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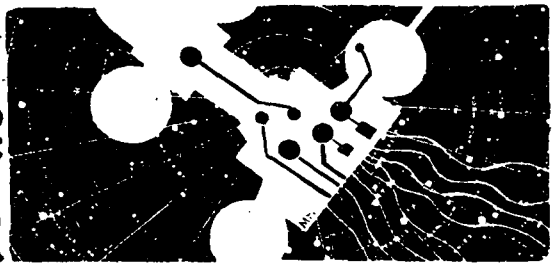
TED WHITE

editorial



MY JUNE EDITORIAL obviously touched a nerve among many of you—the mail is still bringing in letters on the subject of convention expenses, the ways in which the World SF Convention has been and should be run, the Hugo balloting, etc. You'll find a sampling in the letter column this issue, including one from Erwin Strauss, whose letter kicked off my June editorial on the subject. (The topic was continued in the July and September issues of AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION as well, and letters on the subject will also be found in that magazine.)

The subject also came up at this year's Disclave, the annual Washington, D.C. regional conference, held over Memorial Day weekend. I'm sorry that I wasn't in attendance during that part of the program; I'm told the discussion was lively and I've been promised an opportunity to listen to the recorded tapes of the open discussion.

This is good. It was precisely with the idea of kicking out some questions for discussion that I wrote those editorials. It is not my desire to impose "Ted White's Kind of Convention" upon the sf community, although I do have strong opinions of my own. Rather, it was with the idea of bringing some of these problems to the attention of the sf community in order that they might be dealt with by consensus. Obviously I am not going to dictate the shape of World SF Conventions to come. But equally obviously, these conventions must be viewed in terms of the approaching crisis which will occur if they are not given a direction—whether towards tighter-controlled, smaller conventions, or mammoth-sized "trade expositions." The resolution will have to come from the sf community itself. My purpose is simply to stimulate thought on the subject.

And this is now happening. For example, Charles Crayne, the chairman of the LACon (which will be taking place while this issue is on sale), wrote me the following letter:

Dear Ted,

There are of course, a number of areas in which our philosophies concerning SF conventions are quite different, nor am I happy about your vague comments about the questionable reputations of Worldcon committee leaders. I am writing, however, because it seems that there are some issues on which it appears that we are more in agreement that I, at least, would have suspected.

First is an issue on which—in retro-

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spect—I did not give enough thought and have now changed my original position. The days are gone when it was necessary for a Worldcon to be supported by people who were not able to attend. Further, it is desirable that the Hugos be nominated and voted upon by the widest possible membership base. Therefore I now feel that it was a mistake to raise the rates for the so-called 'supporting' memberships along with the attending rates. This rate should be held to the minimum possible which would cover the incremental cost of publications and postage. Even at the current inflated printing and mailing costs, I think that $3.00 would cover the receipt of all convention publications and entitle the member to vote on the Hugo awards.

Attending rates are another matter. For one thing—and you raised this point in passing in your editorials—they are the smallest part of the total con-goers' expenses. The greatest amounts are for transportation. There is very little which the convention can do in this area as rates are set by the government for most forms of transportation. Next in importance are the hotel room rates. This is an area in which the convention committee can play a large part. Compare the Boston room rates with those of our hotel. We have saved our members $10.00 a night on the price of a double room. This savings alone—over the duration of the con—will pay not only our entire membership fee, but will cover the cost of the banquet as well.

Finally, an area in which I can only expound the problems; I do not know any good solutions. There is a very good reason why all conventions start out crying poor and then end up with surpluses. As you pointed out, by the start of the convention the committee has no more expenses. There is no charge for the use of hotel facilities. But before the con there are a number of expenses, most of which must be put out in cash. We have committed $2500.00 for film rental, $300.00 for fashion show materials, and a couple of thousand—still being negotiated—for the printing of the program book, among other expenses. The total projected expenditures to be made before the convention starts is greater than our current funds on hand.

Therefore, every dollar which we take in at the door will either be a repayment of money which has come out of the pocket of one of the committee members, or else it will be a surplus dollar which the committee will later have to designate to a worthy cause. Convention committee members are no richer than the rest of the fan population. Is it any wonder then that we are reluctant to grossly overspend our available funds?

Let's look at the record. With three months to go before the convention we have hotel reservations in for only 180 rooms. Based upon past history there will be at least 600 rooms required at the convention. But it is not easy to sell this event to the hotel. They are saying (and quite reasonably so) when you have reservations for that many rooms then we will talk about additional facilities. By then it will be too late to make intelligent plans.

We have only about half our predicted membership so far. A good portion of that will be picked up at the door. Nothing which we have tried seems to make much of a change in this

(continued on page 118)

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Gardner Fox has pursued two simultaneous literary careers over the last several decades, and readers of this magazine are probably familiar with both. Throughout the forties and fifties and even today he was (and is) one of a very few acknowledged masters of super-hero comic scripting, having turned out scripts for nearly every major comic magazine published. Simultaneously, he has written novels of historical adventure-romance and science fantasy (published by, among others, Gold Medal and Ace Books). His debut here, however, is with a fantasy of magic and romance, mythic in its impact and timeless in nature . . .

THE HOLDING OF KOLYMAR

GARDNER F. FOX

Illustrated by DAVE COCKRUM

IT WAS AT EVENTIDE that the summons came to Conmoral.

The call came on the edge of the wind that sighed and whispered as it ran across the meadows and the tarns of fabled Kolymar, and Conmoral listened with his grey head tilted sideways and a sigh for the forgotten years gathering in his throat. There was much in the world that he had forgotten, much that was changed.

For many years, ever since he had retired from the courts of King Bellarakore, had Conmoral lived on the mountain slopes of Isfanare, removing himself from his following of the war banners and his sitting in the chairs of the high places of the world. Content with his life he was, and none might lure him from his steading with its furrowed rows of things to eat and the dark woods behind it where he hunted with his bow when he felt the need for meat.

Yet now he knew the stir of renewed life within his great frame and the itch of his palm to hold the hilt of his longsword Fiaflane that hung upon the wall beside his shield and his silvered helm and coat of plate-mail. He listened to the wind and what it had to say, and his hand tightened on the leather tankard holding his evening ale. For the wind whispered and the breezes

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spoke, and with his lonely ears that knew the call of loon and cry of wolf and what the starlight says as it quests between the trees of Isfanare, he understood those winds.

"It is time, as the old prophecy said," he nodded.

He rose up from the wooden table and his meal lay uneaten while he clad himself in the shirt of plate-mail and buckled the belt of Fiaflane in its scabbard about his middle.

And the breezes blew past his window, summoning him: 'Come you, Conmoral the Mighty! Rouse up the demon that lay once within your chest when you were general of the royal armies of King Bellarakore. Come you with us in our questing, and bring Fiaflane with you, and your shield and silver battle-helm. For we of Kolymar have a need for you!' And the winds wept and moaned softly, and Conmoral came near to weeping, also.

His shield behind him, hung on a leather thong, his helm dangling from his swordbelt, Fiaflane a heavy weight at his side, the old warrior went away from his steading and the good things to eat nestling in the tilled earth, and the wild things awaiting his hunting arrows in the woods of Isfanare. He went sadly, but proudly, for well he knew that what the old prophecy had said would come true, was now to happen, though it never mentioned the time of its coming.

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He went swiftly through the wildwood along narrow pathways known to his warboots, and ever as he went he found himself shedding the years of his life, that showed themselves in the lines on his face and by the grey hairs amid the gold on his head. His feet walked jauntily, his armor grew less heavy, and there was a fine smile upon his mouth.

To the hut of Sylthia he went, to Sylthia who was a witch, for he had need of her warlock-shared wisdom. And on the door he rapped with the golden apple cunningly entwined in the haft of Fiaflane; and knowing that sharp pounding, Sylthia bade him enter.

The old woman was sitting in a settle beside the open hearth wherein a great fire blazed, and her ancient head was nodding, nodding to the singing of the flames. At sight of Conmoral, she tapped with her blackthorn staff upon the hearthstones, bidding him sit at her feet on the faldstool.

"You came, old man," she cackled.

"Not half so old as you, grandam."

"You'll be wanting the bit of glass you left with me."

"Not glass, beldame, but a jewel, the sapphire Eye of Imbrot which I left with you long ago for the keeping."

The blackthorn stick rose, pointed. "In the cupboard yonder, Conmoral the Conqueror. On the second from the last shelf, in the little leather pouch."

"No conqueror I, old woman," he sighed, getting to his feet and crossing the little room to the cupboard.

"Those were long ago times, true. Yet you should remember."

"I remember most of all your prophecy."

"Aye, and Kyrce? You remember Kyrce?"

"And how I placed her in the vault and locked the graven doors behind me, that the sigils of the gods might pen her there inside for all eternity—or until Kolymar had need of her."

"Ah, you heard the winds. You know," she sighed.

"They bore the smell of smoke and the screams of men and women, and even some few cries of children rudely done to death."

He fumbled for the leather sack, found it and let his fingertips press the leather until the hardness of the sapphire named the Eye of Imbrot was between his fingertips, giving him strength. He fumbled also at the drawstrings and out tumbled the jewel to blink up at him, all blue fire and blue lightnings where the candleglows caught it, on his big, callused palm.

"The lock of the crypt," he sighed.

"Only Conmoral may use it, for it was made for the general of the

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armies with a drop of his blood and a fingernail paring, by wise Within of the Wold. And use it well, Conmoral. There are forces to be loosed with that gem."

"I know, grandam. I know it well."

Into the almoner at his swordbelt he placed the jewel, after tumbling it back inside the leather pouch. His eyes went about the room, observed the hanging garlics and the peppers, the dried meats and the cheeses. And Conmoral sighed, remembering his forgotten meal and the unemptied tankard of nut-brown ale.

At the invitation of Sylthia, Conmoral put aside his plate-mail shirt and laid his great sword and shield and the silver helm upon the rush-strewn floor. He went at her bidding and placed meat and potatoes and turnips, carrots and beans and peppers in the water filling an iron cauldron, and the cauldron he hung over the flames. In a little while the stew was done, its savory smell filling the little hut, and placing bowls before himself and old Sylthia, Conmoral feasted well.

His throat thirsted for the sweet coolness of ale, but of ale the old woman had none. She did offer the freedom of her hearth to his great bulk, if he cared to wrap himself in the bearskin she kept for cold winter nights. She herself would sit and drowse before the fire, for this was the way of witches, and Sylthia had been a dreaded witch in her younger days.

In the morning, Conmoral went on his way, along the narrow hill roads until he came to the kings' highway, and along this road he tramped, grim of face and heavy of heart for the winds were whispering to him again, blowing across all of Kolymar land, and what they said made the tears come into his old eyes.

Here was a burned farmstead and there another, and many corpses lay upon the ground, for the men of Rharm are not gentle men, and they have a cruel way with spear-points and the edges of their swords. Once he paused to cut down a hanged man, and to bury him, and again he stopped in his journeying to whisper prayers above the remains of what had been a pretty girl, before the raping and the torturing.

"Too long have I been away," said Conmoral to the wind.

'You have been away too long,' breathed the wind in his hair. And it added, 'The selfishness of man, who thinks mostly of his ease, can be his greatest folly.'

Before he came to the Kolymar City, he turned off the highway and went down to the marshes of Mindorol, and on the quaking grasses that showed the firm earth where it was safe to walk, Conmoral strode ever deeper into the gloomy fens. And when he had

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walked a long while in those marshlands, he came to a marble edifice that had no name upon its lintel stone but only a blank space.

Yet the bronze doors were graven with the sigils of Emmora and of Cayanon the Good, and several of the other gods whom the people of Kolymar had been wont to worship in better days. And Conmoral who had been The Conqueror in his younger years, knew well enough what lay behind these doors.

Into a recess within the bronze doors he placed the sapphire called Imbrot's Eye and waited, leaning on Fiaflane in its scabbard. Soon the bronze doors opened, silently, and Conmoral stepped within the mausoleum. Dim light showed a woman lying on a flat slab, a woman with a lovely face, whose long-lashed eyes were closed and whose full red mouth drooped sadly as though she dreamed on sorrowful things.

A long black cape wore the woman, and jeweled rings on her slender white fingers, and Conmoral sighed when he saw that her thick black hair bore not a touch of the grey that infected his own, and that hers was a young face, without line or furrow.

"Kyrce," he whispered softly, remembering the old times.

The woman called Kyrce never stirred, so that Conmoral was forced to lift once more the blue sapphire and disarranging her clothes above her heart, placed the gem on the smooth skin between her breasts.

And now Kyrce sighed and her long eyelashes went up and she stared at him with the deep blue of her eyes that matched the tints of the great sapphire.

"I have been dreaming, Conmoral," she whispered.

"Your dreams can come true, Kyrce," he growled.

"Aye, now can I rule in Kolymar."

She stretched her pale arms, she laughed softly, writhing her body before his stare, and Conmoral felt once again the sensuousness of her flesh, that he had long ago put from his mind and thought to be forgotten along with his youth. Her laughter rippled out, since her eyes were very wise and she read what he was saying with his stare.

"Fool," she breathed. "We might have ruled together."

"Your time has come, Kyrce."

"And that witch, Sylthia? Lives she yet?"

"She lives."

Kyrce swung her legs over the edge of the stone slab on which she had lain for these many years and puzzlement showed itself in her face. "You did not free me to look once more upon my beauty, Conmoral. There was another reason."

"The Rharm are in Kolymar, ravishing and looting."

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"And King Bellarakore?"

"Dead. Dust too, by this time."

"And his strong son, Aldarik?"

"Gone over the sea, questing for the unattainable."

"So. The throne is empty, and the Rharm seek to place Rhodiris on its ivory and ebony seat."

"It is as you say."

Her eyelids dropped as she stared at him. "And you, Conmoral? What get you from my freedom?"

"The safety of the people of Kolymar."

Her laughter rang out, harshly triumphant. "Fool! What care I for the people of Kolymar?"

"Nothing. But you care for the throne which is the symbol of rule over the people. Your haunches ache to sit on that throne, Kyrce."

She paced about the mausoleum, rubbing pale arms with pale hands. "Yes, yes. I care for that, certainly. But you give me a poor kingdom, Conmoral who was my lover, long ago. A land invaded, a people reaved, a kingdom looted."

"Not yet. There is time."

She swung about near the open bronze doors to stare at him. "You shall serve me, Conmoral—you and that long sword of yours. You shall take my orders."

He bowed his head. "I take your orders."

"We go first to Kolymar City. I can do nothing here. My athanors and vials of demoniac liquids? My alembic and the aludels? The psalteries and the grimoires in which are recorded my spells?"

"Locked up for many years. Untouched by my order and by command of King Bellarakore. I shall take you to them."

"Nay, nay, man. Let me take you."

Kyrce the sorceress cried out a name, at the sound of which grim Conmoral blanched. She smiled and reached out a hand to him and caught that soft, warm hand and held it as a darkness grew within the vault, thick and black as dead of night, and that blackness gathered up Kyrce and Conmoral and held them like seawater pressing close.

Only the hand of Kryce in his fingers did the old man feel, to know he was alive and that this was happening to him. And the only sound he heard was her soft breathing.

When the darkness lightened, Conmoral saw that he was in the High House of the kings of Kolymar. Before him was the window through which he had gazed many times, that looked out upon the fair city which was that of the kings of Kolymar, and the many parks and fountains with which they had beautified their city. And the city was teeming with the people running out of their houses and through the streets, their backs bent with the weight of their most prized possessions.

"The Rharm are close at hand," Conmoral sighed.

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"Let them come! Can they harm me—or mine?"

Kyrce stretched, her widespread fingers lifting toward the ornate ceiling that had been carved of onyx and carnelian by Afthaman and little Psisto the Dwarf whose body was so ugly that women wept at sight of it, but whose fingers were possessed of the power to make things beautiful beyond the minds of men to imagine.

"I am home, Conmoral. Here shall I stay!"

"As you will, my lady."

Her dark eyes sought out his craggy face burned by wind and sun, and there was suspicion clear to read in her glance. "You seem subservient, who was a general of the armies of Kolymar and who hated me as no man should hate any woman."

"You were evil, Kyrce. You are still evil."

Her thin, plucked brows rose above mocking eyes. "Knowing that, you brought me back to life?"

"The Rharm would destroy. You at least, will keep what is, in Kolymar. Rather your hand hold it than their hands burn and loot it."

She considered that, full lower lip jutting. At last she nodded. "I will accept that. "But if I make you my own general of the armies, I shall expect your utmost loyalty."

"I wouldn't be here, else. I am yours to command."

"Then take me to my rooms."

They moved unchecked and unchallenged through the basalt and ivory halls of the High House of Kolymar, for there were no guards, no servants anywhere about. By wide halls and then by broad staircases covered with deep carpeting did Conmoral lead Kyrce ever upward until they came at last to a round tower and a wooden door barred and bolted.

From the leather purse at his swordbelt, Conmoral drew out keys and fitted them to locks. When the locks were undone, he slid back the bolts and his thickly thewed left arm, that was his shield arm in time of battle, threw open the door to show the woman that which had been hers, years on years ago.

Dust lay everywhere, but Kyrce paid this no heed but walked like the queen she would be in truth, across the grimed carpets and the soiled floors, and sighed. Her athanors and alembics were fouled and useless, her vials and aludels untouched for all the years she had lain in the vault. Sunlight came in through the leaded windows and made a haze in the air from her striding.

"Servants I need, and swabbers of floors," she said.

Across the floor she moved to a certain brocade hanging, dark with age; and her hand closed about it, tugging, and the sound of copper bells rang out above the tower, soft and laden with forgotten wisdoms,

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and when the bells had ceased to ring the old man heard the sound of footsteps coming nearer.

Three women and two men came in through the door, each of them cloaked and booted for traveling, and their eyes were not the eyes of those who know what they are about, for they stared sightlessly at the lady in the long black cape.

"Clean this," said Kyrce, and they cleaned.

"Fetch food," ordered Kyrce, and they went a way with hands empty to hold the meats and viands that might please her appetite. To the old warrior, she breathed, "Stay you also, Conmoral. I have need of humankind after so long a sleep. Put aside your cloak and join me here, on this seat below the west window."

And Conmoral did as bidden.

Kyrce sighed and stared from the window out toward the Mallamoran Hills, behind which the sun was setting, all red glory and shimmering heat that tinted scarlet the clouds that lie above far Indoria.

"You know what I must do, Conmoral?"

"I know, Lady."

"You will be my right hand." Her eyes glanced at him slyly. "And you know also what that will mean. You are old. You must be young."

"Then make me young, Kyrce."

"First I shall do that, and you shall love me as you used to love me, Conmoral the Conqueror. And by the youth I shall hold you, you know."

He sighed, being not so far from his dying days that he did not remember how it had been, being youthful and filled with great strength and vigor. And it might be that in his remembering he recalled also those nights with Kyrce, and how loving she had been until she chose power to that love.

"Would you be young again?" she questioned softly.

"I would, Kyrce," he said softly.

She clapped her pale hands, and she laughed, and her laughter stirred the fires of unremembered manhood that were deep inside the Conqueror. She put her fingers on his and he marveled at the youthfulness of her hands beside his own brawny ones, that showed the marks of age. Long ago, Kyrce had made a bond with some demon mistress by which she had been granted eternal life. It was a good thing for the world that her beauty could be preserved, he thought idly, though it was also a sad thing that she used her wisdom and her arcane knowledge in evil ways.

"Young you shall be, this very night," she promised.

When the servants had come with the meat and viands served on silver platters and the rare Chusthion wine served in silver goblets, and they had eaten, Kyrce went into the pentagram, and carried with her

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those things she might need to make strong magic. The incense in the gold vessels of Ummalthor she lighted so that a fragrant mist came into the chamber, and also the hanging lamps with their oils of Karthay which made a blue radiance in the room.

"Come you, my one-time lover and stand you here, where the lesser pentagram is placed. And do not move, on your life."

Then Kyrce poured liquids and stirred in bits of bone and hair and flesh, and over this she chanted strange words that the Conqueror did not understand, but the blue light of the lamp changed to an angry red and the haze in the room was a scarlet fog.

Out of the fog whispered piping voices and tiny shrillings, and the hairs on Conmoral's neck stood up to hear Kyrce bargaining with the spirits and the demons of the nether places. A hard bargain did Kyrce drive and the spirits and the demons wept to find themselves outcheated, but the voice of Kyrce was as iron and her will as the cold north wind sweeping the arctic wastes.

Conmoral stirred in the little pentagram when he felt the beating of his heart grow stronger and saw that the hairs on his arms which were golden once, long years ago, and were grey now, change back to golden once again. His blood pumped more wildly in his body and when he looked at Kyrce he saw her not with the eyes of age but with the vision of youth that is stirred by the sight of female loveliness and the shapeliness of women's bodies.

The demons and the spirits went away in a little time, and Kyrce smiled from her greater pentagram at Conmoral in his lesser, and her voice was as the sugars that are cut in the gardens of Garial, very sweet and syrupy.

"You are handsome, Conmoral. I had forgotten, but I know now why I fell in love with you. Go, look in yonder mirror."

It was as she had said, he was big and heavily muscled and his shoulders were very wide, and he was young again. The hairs on his head were as gold as the clasps on the king's coffers, that were of red gold from Kerwyddia. His clothes were a little tight to his chest and shoulders (he had lost some of this youthful musculature across the years) and his sword seemed lighter in the scabbard and his helmet not so heavy on his head.

Kyrce came across the room and putting her bare arms about his neck, she kissed him. And Conmoral knew a fire in his veins for this woman, and he kissed her and his hands caressed her softness through the lightness of her thin garment.

"You belong to me, as Kolymar will belong to me, Conmoral," she whispered to his mouth with her

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lips, before holding them against him for more kissing. "You are young, young as I. And you shall stay that way for as long as you are my man."

And she caught him by the hand and led him out of the necromantic chamber and down the narrow steps and narrow halls to the wide staircase and the wide halls of the High House. Into the chamber of the queens of Kolymar she brought him, and to its bed.

In the morning, they who had been lovers in the night took conference together and between them it was decided that there was no need to go out and hunt down the invaders, but to wait here in Kolymar City, where the Rharm would come in their own good time for its looting. They would know that the Rharm were beyond the city gates easily enough, for their horsetail banners would blow with the wind and would make a vast stirring like unto a sea of red blood flowing.

But until that coming, Kyrce must make enchantments in the round tower at the topmost peak of the High House, which had been hers long years ago, and Conmoral would walk in the city and discover how its people fared.

With his sword at his hip and his helmet under the crook of an arm, the Conqueror walked the cobbles of the city he had saved from foreign armies and into which, on his many triumphs, he and his armies had brought the loot of many distant lands, and some even that were not so distant. For Conmoral loved Kolymar, his land and its fair city, and his heart swelled in youthful pride at the sight of statues and fountains he had carried in the army vans for their setting up in Kolymar.

There were few people on the streets, and these only poor folk who had nowhere to go, nor aught to save from the invaders. And they stared at Conmoral with eyes that did not know him, for Conmoral the Conqueror was a legend in this city, but this man with the young face and the golden hair could never have lived so long as to make of his name a legend.

Conmoral sighed as he walked between the fine houses with their walled gardens, locked now against invasion, not that locks would do any good against the Rharm invaders. He thought of the good times he had had in all those houses, of the dancing and the singing, and he came near to weeping that the friends of his youth were gone before the relentless advance of Time and Age.

To the East Gate and the West Gate he walked, and what he saw saddened the heart of him, for there was looting by the poor people who had nowhere to go and nothing in which to travel. They stole and they ate and they drank fine wines the

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like of which their ears had heard but their throats had never known.

Once three drunken men would have robbed him but he drew Fiaflane a few inches out of its scabbard and the men paused, for they had never met a man like this, all in armor with a silver helmet and such a sword, nor one who seemed so capable of using it. He watched them run away with sadness in his eyes.

The sadness was still there when he returned at eventide to the High House of the kings of Kolymar, and only when Kyrce met him with soft laughter and her red mouth that burned his own with kisses, could he shake away his sorrow.

"It has changed. Changed!" he grieved.

"You have still your memories of your past, Conmoral. Those I can remove and shall, when I have done with my other magicks."

They dined in the great hall, beneath a thousand gleaming candles and with the silent servants waiting upon them, as if they were already the king and queen in Kolymar City. On fair meats and rare cheeses they feasted, and they drank the fine wines which had belonged to King Bellarakore, long and long ago.

"It is nearly done," Kyrce said once, pausing in the sipping of her wine.

"I knew it would be," he nodded. "But make more magic and yet more, for in your magic is the salvation of the city."

When the moons of Kolymar rose upward into the sky with its myriad stars, Kyrce and Conmoral walked the terraces of the High House hand in hand, and with them went the fragrances of illius bush and franthal tree, while the sounds of the plashing waters of marble fountains tiptoed all about them. And for a little while Kyrce and Conmoral were in love again, as they had been long ago.

They sat on ebony benches and listened to the singing of the nightbirds, and their hands and fingers intertwined out of old habit. They dreamed of what was to come, of the coming back of the people of Kolymar City, the rich merchants and the princes, once the city had been made safe by the Conqueror, and they longed to hear the laughter and join in the dancing and the singing that would come on that day.

Below them, far below, for the High House of the Kolymar kings rested on a great hill in the middle of the city, they could hear the drunken revelry of the poor people with nowhere to go and no way to travel. And their eyes softened, for they could hear the sounds of love and the soft whispers of men and women snatching at little moments of happiness that did not come their way too often. Kryce even wept, once or twice, softly and with sympathy in her heart that rarely knew

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such an emotion.

"We shall make it up to them," she whispered.

"Aye, we shall—and together."

For a time, then, it was as it had been long and long ago between this man and this woman. Their kisses were as sweet, as fiery, their embraces were as hungry and as fervid. Yet with the morning came the rising sun and a parting of the lips that kissed and the arms that held, for this was the morning when the Rharm were to shake free their horsetail banners to the winds so that they would look like a sea of blood before the gates of Kolymar City.

And from the high windows of the High House of the kings, Conmoral saw those banners beating in the winds and his heart was sick within his chest for he knew that meant an end to the short happiness he had known once again with Kyrce. It was time now to gird himself for battle, to witness the result of the magicks of the sorceress, and to loose the gold and red banner of the kings of Kolymar.

Kyrce came to his side, slipping a hand into his. Her body was a fragrance in his notrils and a warm weight to his flesh where she leaned against him. Her black hair, loosed by sleep, blew against his throat.

"We shall rule here, you and I," she whispered softly, "when this day is done. King Conmoral and Queen Kyrce! It has a glorious sound, my lover."

The heart of Conmoral wept, for he alone knew what the future must bring to them. And the bitterness of fate was on his tongue and in the hard eyes with which he scanned the hosts of the Rharm.

They were as grains along the shores of the ocean, or as the leaves on the trees of the forest in midsummer, and the magicks of Kyrce must be at their greatest if he was to snatch victory this day from the riders of the horsetail banners. His arm drew Kyrce to him, and he kissed the kiss of farewell upon her soft red mouth.

"It is time," she sighed, stirring.

"I go to arm," he told her.

In a while he came from the chamber girt all in mail and helmeted, with the shield on its leather thong hanging down his back and his sword Fiaflane in its scabbard at his side. He strode out into the courtyard and mounted the grey warhorse, seating his great frame in the highpeaked saddle as he had been wont to do in the forgotten years.

Alone, Conmoral rode down from the High House along the road leading to the city. He paced the grey along the broad Avenue of Heroes, and the clopping of its hooves awoke the distant echoes. Now to join those echoes came other sounds and cloppings and the heart of Conmoral swelled within

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his breast for he knew that the magicks of Kyrce were at work.

The clanking of metal, the creakings of leather, the sighs of men were carried softly by the breezes to his ears and no longer could he hear the hoofbeats of his grey warhorse, so loud were they become. Conmoral stood in his iron stirrups and looked behind him and his eyes glittered with pride and his lips curved to a smile of triumph, for he saw rank on rank of mailed men and men in plate armor, their grim faces hidden by their helmets. These were the warriors summoned up by the sorceress, but out of what distand land or forgotten age, he did not know. They were here to obey his commands and to serve the golden banner of Kolymar that he carried in his right hand on a long pole.

"Standard bearer," he cried, and a youth came galloping.

Into his hand he passed the banner and saw that the youth accepted it with a strong left hand, for his right held a grim battle-axe which bore the marks of long fighting.

"Captains," he roared, and ten men trotted to meet him. Hardened veterans were these, wise and wary in the war arts, and when he had questioned them a little, he blessed the wisdom of Kyrce who had found them he knew not where, and brought them here to Kolymar.

Behind the captains were the horsemen, tall and lean with long spears and shields upon their left arms. And the shields bore the lion of Kolymar upon their gleaming metals. Behind the horsemen, which were as many as the cobblestones underfoot, were the pikes and the bowmen, jaunty and confident in their marching, their voices as they sang an unknown song deep-throated with that confidence which men know who have never tasted defeat.

"Arrange your array," he said to the captains. "I will station the pikemen and the archers in thin lines before the city walls, and the horsemen I shall hold in readiness."

The captains nodded, knowing it was a good plan.

The gates of Kolymar clanged open and the pikemen and the archers marched out upon the plain before the city. A murmur of amazement from the hide tents of the Rharm matched their coming, for the invaders had thought Kolymar to be a dead city. In thin lines the pikes planted their butts into the ground while the bowmen fitted arrows to their strings, and waited.

Foremost amid the pikes stood Conmoral as was his habit in wartime, that all men might see his silvered mail and plate armor, and the high helmet with the boar device upon his head. His sword Fiaflane flashed in the sunlight, and a host of slender arrowshafts rose into the morning sunlight and fell among

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the hide tents.

And many Rharm died therefrom.

Yet now the savages charged on their ponies, screaming and whirling their swords and their axes and their war-hammers. The pikes met this charge, killing many on their footlong pikeheads, and freeing those bloodied points, fell back behind the archers who sent their arrows into the massed array tumbled upon their fallen leaders.

These bowman retreated behind the next line of pikes who met the coming charge when the barbarians had brought order out of chaos. And these fell back with the second row of archers taking their place. Fast flew the arrows, like tiny chips of sunlight. And many of the Rharm died on those sharp iron arrowheads and lay stark.

A silver trumpet blew.

The pikemen and the archers wheeled, opening a wide lane and through this opening came the lancers, riding hard, their long spears glittering. They met the barbarian host and cleaved a path through their ranks, even unto the hide tents. There they turned and came back whence they had come, and many were the corpses strewn lifeless in their wake.

Conmoral the Conqueror fought with Fiaflane bloody-red with Rharm gore, standing ever in his stirrups and flailing left and right with his long sword, catching the blows of sword and axe and war-hammer on its great surface so that no weapon might hurt him. His voice called courage to his men, his sword taught them that where he stood was a rock that should not fail.

All day long the battle swelled and raged, for the Rharm were many and their courage was that of the fiends and imps of hell. They hurled themselves on pikes, they felt the bite of arrows, the impalement of long spears and the flashing cuts of sword and axe. And ever death rose up to embrace those barbarians, for the hosts that fought with Conmoral seemed not to feel the steel that struck them nor the blows rained upon their heads and bodies.

The dying sun flamed red as if for the blood that had been spilled this day when the invaders finally turned and ran from this host that held the gate into Kolymar City. They left behind them tents and wagons and herds of horses, for they had only one thought in mind, to flee this land where the soldiers were like the gods that did not die, each and every one of them.

For many years would the tale be told in Rharm tents of the time their warriors had fought the gods at the gates of Kolymar City, and of the man in the silver mail who had stood in his stirrups and swung a long sword that never missed its mark. And this god they knew as

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Conmoral, for so the soldiers named him, shouting in amaze at the manner of his fighting and his body that showed no weariness.

Yet Conmoral was weary unto death, and his body ached in arms and chest and legs, for with his terrible fighting he had lost a little of the magic which Kyrce had put into the young flesh which she had given him. He felt his age, because he still had his memories, and his shoulders were bowed and the sword Fiaflane came near to falling from his fingers.

He rested in the highpeaked saddle, with his head bent and the tears oozing from his closed eyes, for only Conmoral knew what must now follow. And in the heart of him he keened and railed against the fate which the gods decree for each and every one of us, for always there is a bitterness in each life that is not of the making of the man or woman who endures it. Sometimes in the past Conmoral had thought that the gods must hate the race of men because of the torments which the gods visit upon them.

It was dusk when Conmoral straightened his shoulders and his bitter tears dried upon his cheeks. He tightened his grip on the haft of Fiaflane and placed the bloodied blade into its scabbard. Both hands he used to remove his silver helm with its boar device and hold it before him resting on the high pommel of his saddle.

Deep he breathed, and let the night winds come down from the hills and curl about his sweat-wet temples and his golden hair. After a time the winds refreshed him, and whispered to him that his life was almost at an end, that the magicks of Kyrce were ephemeral things and most soon pass as all things passed with Time.

Only he was alive, only the dead bodies of the slain barbarians piled high in heaps and windrows kept him company beneath the glittering moons of Kolymar. Gone were the armies Kyrce had summoned up out of a distant place and a forgotten Time to obey his will this day.

Slowly he rode into Kolymar City.

No cheering throngs greeted his advance, as had been in the long-ago times. No feasting would there be this night, and no dancing, and no laurel wreaths for his gold hair. But there was a light in the highest tower of the High House of the kings, and there would he find Kyrce practicing her magicks.

With troubled heart and grieving mien, Conmoral doffed his battle armor and put on the purple tunic with the golden braid which Kyrce had prepared for him, and purple hose and boots of soft brown leather. Around his middle he wore a belt of golden links, from which hung a scabbard holding a dagger with a golden haft.

As such, a king would array him-

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self, Conmoral thought, moving up the steps of the worn stone staircase to the tower. He would be a king in Kolymar, with Kyrce as his queen. The merchants and the princes would come back to this city that was their home, which Conmoral and Kyrce had saved for them, and they would bend their proud knees and do them homage.

Kyrce met him with warm arms and soft lips and catching him by the hand, drew him to the lesser pentagram. With a final kiss she stepped into the greater pentagram and began to pour the oils and liquids from her alembics upon the unholy fire that shone red and purple in the silver braziers. There was no smoke from those fires that drank the oils and liquids but only a faint sighing.

"What would you, Kyrce?" he asked softly.

"I summon up the demons and the imps, my love. It is time for their rewarding. So it was in the past with Kyrce, as you may recall, so it is now and shall be again. You remember, I know, for I have not yet destroyed your memories."

Through the narrow tower windows Conmoral could hear the screamings of the poor people, those who had nowhere to go and no way by which to travel. There was fear and horror in those voices and Conmoral knew that the demons and the imps were ravening in the poorer corners of the city where lived the only people still in Kolymar City. The beings of the nether hells were claiming their reward by feasting on human souls which they ate as wolves eat the flesh of an elk they fell with their sharp fangs.

So was the way of Kyrce in the old days, that would come again. The human sacrifices which were due of those who served her and made her magicks, this was the price she paid for her greatness.

And Conmoral stepped from the lesser pentagram to the greater. In his hand he held the dagger with the golden hilt, the blade of which was of true steel, long and very sharp.

Into Kyrce he plunged the blade, and wept to his thrusting. Deep he drove the steel and Kyrce died there on her feet.

Conmoral caught her and kissed her waxen cheeks and grieved with a sorrow that shook him as might the ague. The gods do hate men and women and torment them with the destinies their hands have written for them in the Books of the Elder Gods. And it was written on that page which belonged to Conmoral that he must slay the thing he loved, to avert a great tragedy for the people of Kolymar City.

Dead he laid the woman he loved on the tiled floor and long he knelt above her body, sorrowing in his heart for what might have been and could never be, except perhaps in

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THE FORGES OF NAINLAND ARE COLD

AVRAM DAVIDSON

Illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

The forges of Nainland are cold—for all the iron of Thule is plagued and dying into rust. And Arn the Bear must find the cure, even while fleeing for his life! This piece of advice he bears: Feed the Wizards!

(SECOND OF TWO PARTS)

SYNOPSIS

First comes All-Caller, the Great Fey Horn. Next comes True Iron. True Iron casts out False. Next comes Fireborn, firstborn Son of Fire. Fireborn hews False Iron into pieces. All is known to the Wizards, but the Wizards are known to few or none. The Nains know Iron, more ever than Men do know Iron, much more do the Nains know. But there be things which e'en the Nains know not, e'en of Iron: and these do the Wizards know. And if their mouths be closed, there is that which will make them open.

—From THE CHANT OF UÜR-HEVVED-HEVVED-GÜUR

One queen is every queen.

—From THE SONG OF THE BEAR

ARTENAS-ARNTEN *(". . . which means, in the Old Language, in the Witchery-tongue, Bear-man-son-of-the-Bear . . .") was a kinsman of* KING ORFAS *of Thule.* When the man is in the bearskin, then the bear is in the blood, *was a warning his father had given him before his death.* When the wolf meets the bear, beware! *was another warning, this one known to all the folk of Thule—including "the Orfas." And in "the Old Tongue, the Witchery-language,"* orfas *meant Wolf . . . as* arn *meant Bear! By tasting of the severed tongue of a supposedly dead crow, Arn learned to understand the language of wild creatures; he had also unwittingly cut out the tongue*

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of MERRED, *the King's Chief Witcherer. Iron, the only weapons-metal of Thule, was dying, to the deathly fear of Thule's king—who was ill unto death himself.*

Arn and his childhood fellow CORM, TALL ROKE *the hunter, and Arn's great-uncle* BAB *the witcherer, had made plans to go seek a cure for the rust-plague. These were interupted by the sudden arrival in their village of King Orfas, who believed that Arn already knew how to "remove the curse on iron"—and demanded that he at once do so. This not being done, the King ordered Arn to don his bear-skin and to descend, bear-wise, into the ground for the long and death-like winter-sleep of the bear. By this King Orfas intended only that Arn starve to death, warning that if he should emerge before the hibernating time was over, he would be killed . . . and, perhaps, even if after . . . Alerted in time, Corm blew a summons upon* ALL-CALLER, *"the great fey horn"—and Arn emerged, bear-like and alive. The King and his followers fled in terror and in fear.*

The four then made their way to Nainland, where the old Chief Smith advised them about a journey to the distant Wizards who, having for their own reasons, cursed iron, alone could tell how the curse might be removed. He warned, also, that One queen is every queen. *And he repeated words Arn had heard his own father say, that*

"Lion, tiger, wolf and bear,
Bee and salmon, mole and hare,"

all could "shift their shapes."

The company, now grown to five by the addition of a younger Nain, set off for the long, dangerous way to the Great Glens of Wizardland. In the Death Marshes they were attacked by a giant salamander, which they killed and skinned. It was after that, seemingly in a fairer and safer part of Thule, that Arn trysted in a river with a lovely woman and her sib. It was only as he heard strange sounds from afar that he saw the water-folk "were all quite close to him . . . about to dash at him . . . greatly all were changed . . . their teeth were sharp . . . he saw them for what they were, truly . . . undines . . . salmon-folk, the eternal enemies of the salmon-eating bear . . ."

But once again he had been—and once again just in time—saved by Corm's sounding of All-caller, the great fey horn.

CHAPTER FIVE

ROKE LAUGHED and then for a moment the laughter seemed about to turn into some other, infinitely less pleasant sound, then it was

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once more a laugh. Long he laughed, and loudly, throwing back his head and his chest out. Between the river and the steam bath and the soapy herb old Bab had found and prepared and which all had used, all were clean now, but Roke seemed at that moment cleaner than any. His hair, which had grown dark and matted, was again light and the ends of it past where a piece of thong now held it waved in the wind. Ugly reddled marks were still on his skin, but already much faded from when last they had seen them. And the red mark of the Star Bear glistened on his breast.

Eër-derred-derred-Eër, who had never left Nainland before he had left with them, and so had never before seen Smoothskins in full exposed smoothness of skin, looked and wondered and opened his mouth as though he would laugh, too. His own shagginess was quite sleek and was lighter than the familiar chestnut-brown of the older Nains. "Roke-Tall, why do thee so much laugh?" he asked.

And Roke, who had finished with a prolonged silent spasm, lifted his well-worn leathers and sniffed at them, threw them down with a loud snort. "They have a half-winter's stink!" he said. "I shall hang them in a good safe tree to air well till we return, and my advice as friend and brother is for all of thee do the same: else I must walk upwind. Yes! Naked I shall go, but I shall not stink— What ask, Nainfellow?—But although it be good to be feeling the clean wind all over clean me for a change, have I not got some clean garments of pounded bark-cloth?" He muttered and turned as though to go and open his pack, then turned again.

He faced the young Nain and stared at him as though trying to think of either answer or question. Then his skin reddened until the Star Bear almost vanished and the red stain swept down until it vanished in the tangle of blonde hair. Then it ebbed. "I laughed, Nainfellow, because there be a many who deem me dead." And he told him why and how. "I laughed because until now I had very much doubted the fact of my dying, but until now I was perhaps not all sure, do 'ee see, Shagfellow? And I laugh because I now know that I be in no wise dead, and I laughed to learn that though I did stink, it was a live man's stink and not a dead one's!"

He found his clean clothes, unrolled and stepped into them. They were all marked in root and berry-dye with a multitude of bright signs and sigils, suns and moons and stars and leaping stags and such like. He patted and smoothed them, then straightened up until he was again for true "Tall Roke." No trace of slouch or strain seemed to remain. And something had rolled off his soul as well.

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"Now," he said, placing one hand upon the other's shaggy shoulder. "And now," he said, "do thee and me and three others follow the bear and his witchery-hide-map and let us onto Wizardland and there us shall mayhap persuade a several sages that they ben't dead, either!"

The Bear had also benefited by the several days of crouching in the steam-hut whilst water was dashed on red-hot stones and then rushing, streaming with sweat and sweated-loose winter-dirt, into the river. They had beaten each other with small bundles of twigs and sluiced themselves with soaproot, rubbed themselves and each other with sand and scraped their skins with flat stones and then they had done it all over again. The bearskin—*The Bearskin*—had also been subject to a milder cleansing, and now dangled, inside out over his back, *flip flap* it said as he stalked along.

Had the Bear also benefited by anything else which had occurred by the river? Certainly he had benefited by the second sounding of All-Caller. As for more than that— But the flapping of the bearhide reminded him of another hide, and he drew out the map the Nains had painted for him. There was the green wiggle and fish which meant *river*; they had passed that. Ahead was the sign for *fire*, repeated several times: how far ahead and exactly what this meant, he did not

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know. He understood that there were *hills* . . . or was that, were they *mountains*? Did it at all matter? It might. And over here, *this* odd sign meant *wizards*.

But, this one, this one, *this* one—?

He slowed his pace and let the others catch up with him, then asked. He had expected that neither Corm nor Roke would know, and, indeed, though he had tried to explain the notion of a map to them, neither could form any other idea than that the hide was painted with witchery signs: potent, to be sure: but not to be understood by them. Thus he was not surprised that when he indicated the sigil with his thumb the two of them merely breathed more deeply, and then looked at him.

His old uncle's dark brows, flecked with a few several writhing white hairs, seemed to gaze themselves, as well as his eyes. He looked intently at the indicated sign. He said, "I may have known. I do not know now. But even those I know are painted just as I would paint them, these be Nain-paints, my sister's grandson."

Eër-derred-derred-Eër looked long and looked close. "It says to me that once I did see it." He paused and looked more and, as he inclined his head, seemed indeed to listen as well as look. "It says no more," he concluded.

Arn sighed. Roke had thought of something. "Bab, why does thee not build a hut and make witchery over this sign, then?" And Arn made a pleased sound. But Bab slowly and emphatically shook his head.

"I do not know this sign," he repeated. "If I draw it, I may give it power. If I knew it, then I would know, for a first thing, how to keep power over it while I worked with it; and, if I knew it, then I would be able to obtain power from it . . . perhaps. But . . . to do witchery-work with a strange, an unknown sign? No, Bear, and no, Roke: this is not done."

Roke drew away from the map, and, indeed, he would never draw near whenever it was open, again. And so they went on. The trees now were larch and spruce and aspen, not—these last—as he had first thought—birch. And this once more put him in mind of the undines, and he wondered again what had happened if Bab, alarmed at his, Arn's, not having returned by late afternoon, had not taken the major measure of telling Corm to blow the great fey horn. Twice, now, had it . . . they . . . saved him. He thought about this as they crossed the low, rolling hills carpeted with spring flowers; and then his mind fell into a revery and he was not really aware what he was thinking of at all. Perhaps, then, he least of any was prepared for that incident which brought from the Nain a grunt of surprise, from Bab

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an exclamation of astonishment, from Roke a cry of alarm, and from Corm a wail of sheer pain.

Corm had set his foot down on it, and had been going slow, perhaps even dawdling, for he did not casually bring his foot up to take another slow step but stood there—not even holding it in his hand—stood there awkwardly on one foot, the other merely suspended. And he pointed, his wail ending abruptly, subsiding into a hiss of anguish.

For where his foot had been was a small smoldering place in the grass. "Oh, it hurts!" he exclaimed. And hopped on one foot a pace to sit down and nurse his burn. They gathered round, partly to console and think what comfort they might administer, partly to examine this oddity. Their shadows fell across the tiny spot, and in that darkness they saw a small red eye of fire. Roke was first to speak.

"Make water on it," he said, "same as though 'twere a cut, for a man's own water has healing salts." This was customary folk-wisdom, all nodded, finding comfort in the known in face of the unknown. Roke helped Corm to his good foot, and, the younger man leaning against him for support as he began to carry out the suggestion, Roke himself followed his own counsel, but aiming his urine on the burning place. It hissed as though itself in pain; it steamed. And Bab rummaged in his bag of medicines and came up with a small horn of some fat a long-ago winter's night prepared with herbs. He murmured as he wiped Corm's foot dry with a tuft of grass and with his finger he gently spread the salve upon the already-reddening place, and fastened a very soft strip of bark around the foot from instep to sole; and fastened it so, deftly.

"Tis odd, tis odd," he murmured. "Tis very odd."

And then, Corm placing his weight upon the foot with only a slight grimace and they starting off once more, Arnten, pointing said, "And not that one 'odd' alone: look—"

Ahead of them yet another wisp of smoke ascended.

They came up to it very cautiously, yet not so close as to the first one, yet it needed not that closeness, for it was somewhat larger. "It be a fire-ring," the young Nain said. And sure enough, it was not a mere spot or small full-circle, but a true ring, and in the midst of the burning was an unburned core of grass.

"The grass is not dry," said Arnten.

"Well for us that it is not," his old-uncle declared. "Else all might burn, and us with it." And they shuddered, remembering the great grass-fires which sometimes swept the dry plains, driving men and beasts and birds before it in full terror and flight. Then, seeing Roke

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again fumbling at himself, "Nay, let us press on, thee cannot hope to piddle out every unsought smolder-fire we may meet—"

They laughed, perhaps more than the wit of it deserved, and they walked on, walked on faster. Then before their eyes and even while they scanned the turfy grass, they saw the next circle spring up into fire before their gaze. One united sound of dismay they made. Corm, as though without thinking, made a twisting movement with his index finger and began a childhood chant familiar to them all . . . perhaps even to the Nain. *"Ringy-ringy-ringworm, firey-firey-fireworm, little-worm, big-worm, out-thee-GO—!"*

At GO, he flung his finger out as though flicking something away. And they all solemnly spat three times, as though they were indeed children at solemn play trying to exorcize an itch.

"May it be to some avail, and soon," Bab said. "But let us not wait here to see, for while we have waited, there has another sprung up—" They started off at great pace, going off their straightly-intended path to avoid this newer and alas greated circle of smoke and fire. And while they walked so quickly they, with one unspoken accord and one unrehearsed movement, looked back over their shoulders, as though to see if safety might be had by return.

Yet behind them as before them the gouts of fire on several sides were springing up, not less behind than before. They skirted this newest, nearest burning ring, and glanced away from it with some wordless noises of satisfaction, but pleasure was shortlived indeed: For whilst they were circling one circle, all round and round about them another one had been growing.

They broke into a run, they raced as never Arnten had remembered racing, not even when he had fled, racing, from the sudden mob in his home hamlet; and they did not pause, they leaped over the low-smouldering loop; and landed, half-stumbling, half-falling, on the yonder side. For a moment, at least: safety.

But fire-loop was now crossing and intersecting fire-loop, and though they kept on running, kept on jumping and kept on leaping, there was no more sign of reaching unburning land than there seemed to be of the medicine-chant's having had any success. Arnten's pack humped and bumped and flapped against his side, and he made a ducking gesture so as to pass the belt over his head and so let the pack drop and so be rid of it and so run on the faster and the better: in drawing the pack up past his face, or in drawing his face down past his pack, his nostrils were met with a wet and musty smell, almost a stink, a reek of something which

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was not fish, though for an instant he thought of that; nor yet snake, though for a second he was reminded of that. There was something very important, urgent, in that brief reek. His mind said: Run! His feet said: *On!* His heart said: *Woe!*

But his nose said, *Stop!*

And he stopped, and surrounded as he was by heat and by reek and by smoke and by the smoking shadows of death, down he sat him. He heard say, moaning, "Arnten has fallen—"

Roke: "Arnten—back, then, back to him—"

The Nain came trotting and came shambling back not fearing now to let himself be seen on all his four limbs, his long arms, knuckles to ground, aiding him as though legs—the Nain made his way with surprising swiftness, and he took hold and Arnten flung his arm off— "Eh, a-be's daft, 's brains do turn from fear and fire!" the Nain bellowed, and made as though to catch him up and carry him off. Arnten, burrowing in his pack, delving and tugging, brought up his sweat-streaked face, forced himself to speak.

"I am not—" he panted. He thrust up a hand to avoid Roke's lunging arm.

"—my mind is well—" he ducked to escape his uncle's withered paw.

"Don't leave me—wait—wait—for you—for you as well for me—here—here—here—and here—"

At full long last he had it from his pack, he had the packet, he had it unfastened, he spread it out, unfolding it, unfolding them. He gestured, he tried to explain, his voice breaking. Half they would seize and drag him, half they strove to get his meaning. Half they would have fled and saved themselves, half they were full loathe to do so. And it was, as might have been expected, Bab, who first comprehended.

Who stooped, snatched up, sat himself down.

Who cried, doing so, "That sign. . . .that witchery sign. . . . Nay, bind your feet, all! Bind your feet! Wrap these strips of skin round about your feet! These be the cutting from that beast back there . . . from that dragon-beast . . . from that salamander . . ."

And they sat themselves down, though death was burning brightly all round about them. And they gravely wrapped around their feet the wet and cold skin of the salamander, the dragon, the dead dragon, finding their life in his death. And they arose, and with one's hand on the other's shoulder, coughing and stumbling in the smoke, they strode yet safely across the burning rings. And nothing of them did burn.

CHAPTER SIX

WIZARDLAND LOOKED FEY

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INDEED.

It seemed as though many great rivers, or one great river which had shifted its channel repeatedly, had coursed through the land over endless ages. Eroded cliffs, gaunt escarpments, high and low plateaux and buttes were the up and down features of the terrain. Grey gravel crunched under their feet, and then there was grey sand and then smooth grey pebbles which were hard for feet to find a purchase on, rolling and sliding. This gave way to wide beds of coarse red sand and beyond that the red sand was finer and then their trudging, stumbling feet sent up clouds of red dust which bit into nostrils and throat. The way led between huge black boulders beneath beetling black clifts and nut-sized black pebbles graded slowly into seed-sized grains of black sand which hissed beneath their feet. After a while there were streaks of gold in the blackness, and then streaks of blackness in the floor of golden sands. Black and white and gold and black and red, over and over again.

But of the river or rivers which had, ages after ages, rolled and roared and ground and eaten their way into the tortured surface of the land, eaten their way deeper and deeper, eaten the rock into gravel and the gravel into sand, washing away every trace of soil, leaving not even a pocket of true earth—of these mighty and age-long waters, not a drop remained. The courses of Wizardland were dry, long dry.

The courses of Wizardland were dry.

Witchery-Bab crooned a soft song, chanting in the Old Tongue. In each hand he held a branch of rowan with the red berries dried on them. The others had spread out from him without speaking, almost without thinking of it.

When the old man paused, as he did now and then, they all did the same. Now, to the right, an enormous black spire of rock retreated upward at a shallow slant. Vast and irregular red-and-black streaked blocks lay to the left as though tumbled and left there by giants at play. A slight wind rustled the rowan-twigs in the old man's hands and the berries rattled. But there was no wind felt upon them, however slight. Only a chill, a crawling of the skin, a puckering of flesh around erect hairs, as they saw the rowans tremble and move in the old man's hands, and slowly and slowly shift.

And the old man shifted with them till they ceased to shift further, only they trembled and the dried berries rattled on the dried twigs. And the old man moved on, and they moved on with him.

A canyon of grey rocks all humble-tumble and eaten into a wilderness of holes prepared them gradually for the great inward-

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slanting cleft in the rock which they saw before them at the time of no shadows, at the canyon's end. A blind wall of high grey stone faced them, blind, that is, save for the single slant eye of the cavern. And they slumped, all, and stopped, all, and all of them sighed what seemed to be one same and drawn-out sigh.

Now for the first time since they had entered this fey region of rock and sand and cliff and stone, the old man seemed to be slightly uncertain as to what move he must make next; and he stood hesitant, his mouth moving but his song silent, and the rowan-twigs still rustling in his hands. In his old-uncle's eyes as they now turned towards him, Arnten read the wish for help. He took two strides and took the rowans and set them flat upon the smooth grey sands of the canyon floor, straightly pointing to the cavern mouth. There was a slight sound in his throat as the medicine-twigs slithered forward the space of the breadth of a few fingers, as though drawn by hands unseen. Then they stopped. A dry susurration as of insects' wings seemed to sound all round them in the dry, flat air: but if it was still an actual sound or the memory of one, the faces which they wore implied nought but doubt.

Next Arnten merely dropped his burden, and this heavy and simple sound, accompanied by the relieved grunt of a man simply glad to be lighter of a weight, changed the mood. For all of them bore burdens, and they all now hasted to let them slide as they stooped and turned. The old one groped and fumbled his fire-kit, made no objection when Roke, with a murmur, squatted beside him and took up the sticks and the dried fungus and plied his hands rapidly to work. Now Arn and Nain-Eër set to work to cut the thigh-bone of the deer from the hip-socket and the flesh of the haunch from the bone, stone knife and iron knife and force and thrust and snap and slash. The liver and a slab of the kidney-fat lay neatly wrapped together in a deer paunch.

Fire spurted soon from the pinches of dried fungus fed into the socket of the lower fire-stick, moved to a handful of rush grass, was fed to a cone of thin sticks, ate the heavier firewood they had brought upon their backs to this land devoid of twig or grass or tree . . . died down into coals. The marrow bone was laid in first to roast, and then the liver and the fat, which fed the fire its own unctuous fuel without the need of more wood. The spittle filled their dried mouths, but none dared as yet even lick a finger.

And still and always the echo of a dry rustling seemed to sound in every ear.

Arnten presently cracked open the steaming marrow-bone and he

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poked out the soft marrow-core and let it fall upon the clean piece of bark which did for dish. And next to it he set a slice of the crisped fat, and beside that he placed a slice of the liver, bubbling richly in its blood.

"Salt," he said.

They gave him the bone bottle of sea-salt and he opened the carved stopple and sprinkled the offering with the clean white crystals, six times strained through fine filters. Then he rose to his feet and the bark platter was carefully handed up to him and he and the old man walked with deliberate pace forward, and the others sat where they were, and trembled. And the two walked into the cave and then their feet were heard and then their feet were not.

II

THE ADJUSTMENT from light to shadow was gradual, and in the half-light they saw something protruding from the wall of the inner cave which might have been a mummy-bundle, all grey and dusty and clad in wrappings: but mummy-bundles do neither tremble howsoever faintly nor do they twitch and rustle. Recognitions came in quick flashes. Two bundles of twigs: *hands*. Faint gleams as of dewlight on dirty stones: *eyes*. Ceremonial mask long hung away forgotten to moulder and gather dust: *face*. The faint drone, faint rustling, the faint movements were reminiscent of nothing so much as of the tired and desperate and hopeless motion and sound of an insect somehow still faintly alive in winter.

Arnten first dipped his finger in the bubble-blood and poked it into the dry, dry cavern of the mouth, felt it touch the dry and dusty, faintly trembling tongue. The travesty of a mouth, with the least conceivable pressure, sucked the seethed blood from the finger-tip as though a newborn and dying babe were sucking milk from a teat. Next he smeared the fat of the offering upon the dry, seared lips, the sear cracked lips; and watched them slowly close upon each other, heard the almost inaudible smack of those dead and dusty lips. He wafted the odorous steam of the meal under those dust-choked noseholes. He saw the grey-smeared eyelids quiver, the faint gleam widen.

So, slowly, slowly, slowly, he fed the Wizard.

The first thing the Wizard said, after a long time: "*Now my sibs there* . . . ." Even farther into the shadow and the gloom were two other huddled bundles which faintly buzzed and faintly rustled like two dying flies; Arnten perceived how close alike is life's revival to its conclusion.

So, slowly, slowly, slowly, he fed the Wizards.

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III

THEY ATE THE LIVER, every morsel. They sopped up the marrow, every soft crumble of it. They licked up every congealing drop of fat. By this time it was so far declined from noon, when he had entered, that he could barely make out their nodding heads and wavering hands as they dismissed him. "It was well done," he was told, in creaking, faltering tones. "And now we would rest a moment, till daylight come again . . ."

The empty piece of bark, which Arnten burned upon the barely-living fire, answered the question his companions did not ask. He and his old uncle and counsellor sank down and sighed heavy sighs and watched the greasy bark, once clean, blaze brightly in the dying embers. They blinked. After a while Arnten asked, "Have you eaten?"

There was a somewhat incredulous silence. And Corm asked, "Have *you*?"

"We? We were feeding Wizards . . ." Now it was the turn of Corm, Roke, and Eër-derred-derred-Eër to sigh.

"Feeding Wizards," the young Nain repeated. He paused. The great part of their journey had been accomplished; for—it seemed to him now—all his life he had been hearing his elders and even his age-peers muttering that "The Wizards must be fed"; that, were they but fed, the curse would vanish from iron, the King and the King's men would cease to molest, that the forges of Nainland once again would grow hot and their smokes attaint the air: once again all would be as before; hence, all would be well. But now Nainland seemed infinitely far away, and its concerns infinitely remote. In this arid and barren land only one thing now seemed real to him: his hunger. And although his tongue still retained some natural diffidence, his body did not.

The young Nain's enormous and unpremeditated eructation echoed in the all but complete darkness and rolled from canyon wall to wall. For a moment Corm and Roke waited, aghast, for some ghostly Wizard, or some Wizardly ghost, to avenge the insult. But the echoes died away, and all, for the moment, was silent. Only for a moment, though. Next Corm's belly gave a series of warning rumbles, and then from his mouth, too, for a second blowing aside the wispy moustaches and beard which now proudly obscurred it, broke the same impatient sound which had from the Nain's. And next and at once, as though rehearsed, and well-rehearsed, a by far deeper series of growls caused Roke's taut belly to writhe, and he uttered by far the loudest brunk of the three.

Old Bab slowly and economically laid a twig at the edges of the fire. It

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fired, showed what might have been a small, old smile on those lips which none there had ever really seen to smile before. "I wit it not," said Arnten, slowly shaking his head. "The wizards alone have eaten, all three, and now you three here— Eh. Well." He reached for the carcass of the deer, drew it towards him and the fire. "Well, Eh. Now, then, do we let eat. And let the Wizards . . ." His voice died away. And presently the drip-drip-drip of fat into the fire caused it to spurt and flare. And Wizardland saw and heard a feast which was neither magic nor symbolic. And afterwards they let the fire die down, and then they all lay near the ashes. And slept.

In the morning an odd and unfamiliar droning sound they heard, but, being both bone-weary and full of meat, they grunted and rolled over and covered their eyes against the interfering sun. The droning increased, became clamorous. They sat bolt upright, all of them. A clear sunlight shone cleanly on the grey sands and grey stones of this canyon in Wizardland. Three figures they saw before them, now standing still, now walking back and forth, now gravely folding their legs under them and sitting, now sedately rising to their feet and waving their arms and now turning their backs, and then at once turning to face them again.

It was the three Wizards of the caves, well awakened from their long and hungry slumbers, and giving tongue and voice to the comments and the conversation and the thoughts and dreams, the unanswered and indeed the unasked question of an undred years tumbling from their lips— Lips no longer sere and cracked but full and red, eyes no longer dull under dusty eyelids but gleaming bright. And mouths no longer dry, and—certainly—no longer choked with dust and certainly no longer silent. The Wizards of Wizardlands had, or at least three of them, had been fed. And the Wizards of Wizardland, or, at any rate, three of them, were now speaking. All at the same time. And they spoke and they spoke and they spoke, and they walked as they spoke and they spoke as they walked.

For three days and for three nights, during which the five companions first looked and listened with astonishment and then with awe, and next tried to sort out any syllables from any other syllables, and after a while at first with diffidence and then with desperation and after that with something close to wrath and then with growing bafflement tried to be heard themselves . . .

For three days and for three nights the three Wizards talked without ceasing and walked as they talked, back and forth. Then as it approached the cold grey dawn

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when the ghosts all flee, a gradual silence fell. And the walking slowed. And, one by one, with an abrupt –but not ungraceful movement each, the Wizards sat them down. And stayed seated. Red-eyed, not sure if they themselves were asleep or awake, or perhaps doomed to remain and gather dust for a century, weary and confused and not certain, more, of anything, the five watched in silence.

And then the nearest of the Wizards, and evidently the one first fed, said, in a clear tone unfatigued, "Men and Man Bear and Youngling Nain. You have fed us sufficedly, you have listened to us not unpatiently, and you are waiting for us unhastily. This is all according to the natural order and basis of things, and far different—we perceive—from a former age which allowed us to famish: ahah ahah ahah! *That* was not well done! Anumph. We dwell not on that. We have waited and you have waited, and although your wait was not so long as ours, think not that we exact hour for hour. Nay. So. One at a time, then, speak you speaking and we shall hearken. And ask, for here eventually come all answers, undistracted by the false delights of life such as be in other lands and provinces, such as fruits and trees and fair flowers and female flesh and wild beasts and birds for to hazard and for to chase: but here be ne things but stone and sand and clean pure air . . . and, of course, anumph, we the Wizards . . . Therefore all wisdom cometh here and all knowledge cometh here and all wittings and wottings and all sapiences and powers. To be sure that they adventure forth from their sources and disperse over every land and province and island and main, but in thother places there be such distractions as I did mention priorly, hence all wisdom there does dissipate and all knowledge doth melt and doth dwindle . . .

"But the breath and spirit and ghost of all thought and learning cometh here in their comings and find ne thing to disadvantage them, and hence we of the Wizardry do absorb them as we absorb a sunbeam. Nought do distract us, neither getting nor giving nor delving nor tilling nor trapping nor chasing, of neither kind of venery are we attracted, and we hew no wood, having none to hew. Hence all these wisdoms and wittings and wottings do accumulate amongst us and are but dimished in the very slightly by that we do one time in an undren yearen eat one meal. And if towards the conclusion of that cycle cometh another meal, we scruple ne to eat it also. And if there cometh none, we do but estivate and wait.

"However, we account it as an ill-done thing if none of the folk who dwell in the world of fleshly forms take pain to bring us not so much as

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a suppance of blood, liver, fat and marrow, sprinkled lightly with clean sea-salt and served as is proper upon a clean piece of bark, not e'en one time in one undren yearen. To speak as to the point, as be our manner, sparingly and sparsingly and without a superfluity of syllables, this neglectancy hath disturbed the pure concentrations in which we would prefer to spend our days and times and cycles, it hath happed—that we can recall—but a two or a three times since men began to dwell upon the soil of Ultima Thule, and as for the other Thules and what did and did not occur in those lands and in those days, we chuse not now to speak.

"Who in general hath sent us food but the kings who have set their feet upon the necks of men? For who else hath had power to summons men from fireside and women's arms and send them upon the journey hither, the distances and perils of which men have alway so exaggerated, as though a swamp or a salamander or a what or a which were all that much matter or marvel? Well, well, it be not for us to bear grudge or execute vengencies, but if the generalty be not reminded they will themselves suffer, thus out of a concern for them greater than our concern for ourselves, we have found it needful and necessary to set forth a doom. No doubt this doom hath vexed a king and he hath been moved to enquire as to what uncare of which natural basis and order of things hath upset the universal balancies. Anumph. Anumph."

This wizard had the form of a man in full vigor, with ruddy cheeks and sparkling eyes. And the second Wizard bore the form of a stripling youth and smiled and cast down his face as it seemed he were shy in such a company, and spoke so softly that the others strained to hear. "We thinks that we've slumbered longer than somewhile as usual," he murmured. "Weseems it be arrived to the near time of Fireborn, the first-born son of Fire, who hath so often died and ever returned in one form or another. Ah we, but have ever born a love for Fireborn, and would gladly go forth even from our choicest place of Wizardry for to see and for to be with Fireborn again . . . ." His words passed from words into a sound like the laughter of a stripling young man who deems it delicate not to behave too vigorously in the presence of elders.

The third Wizard had the form of a stout witchery-woman and sage femme, a granny of good wealth and position, and hale yet in all her health and humors, with a dignified sprinkling of beard upon her face, and she pursed her lips and said in the tone of one giving portents, "One queen is every queen, beware," and it seemed to Arnten that he had heard this once, and

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that certainly to hear it twice and elsewhere and moreover from such a source enhanced it as a caution: but for the moment he could not pause to consider it but he placed it into his memory as a squirrel does a nut in its cheek or an ox a cud in her rumen. And she said, "When the stars throw down their spears and pelt the earth with thunderstones, go seek the new iron to cure the old." And she said these things with a heavy and a slow tone, rolling eyes and bobbing her head heavily.

The first Wizard had spoken so profusely and so swiftly, as though still making up for more than a century of not speaking at all, that he had almost lost them. And the second Wizard had spoken so softly that almost they had not heard him at all. But now the manner of the third Wizard was so familiar to them, and her voice neither too swift nor too soft: and so they listened full well. And she told them, "There is come an end to certain things, and thus a beginning to certain others," and they nodded. And she said, "The wood which has burned without burning shall be fittest to burn for Fireborn," and they leaned forward and missed no syllable. And she spoke of many another thing, but the two things she had said first stirred most in the mind of Arnten. And he bethought him, even as he listened, what it might mean, that *One queen is every queen*, and he thought that somehow he did know. And he wondered how *The stars* could indeed *throw down their spears and pelt the earth with thunderstones*, and he knew that this he did not know at all.

But must wait until the knowing of it would be revealed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NAME of the first Wizard they learned was Gathonobles. And the name of the second was Wendólin. And the name of the third was Imma-Unya. And it was the second who accompanied them.

Arnten was not sure by any means that they had learned all that he would know, but they could not stay, there was no food in Wizardland save that which they had brought with them; nor any water or other drink, either. So the five were now increased to six, and the two other Wizards they saw, as they went their way from the grey canyon walled with grey time-eaten stones and floored with grey time-washed sand, still sitting and pondering; no longer engaged in converse, no longer paying their visitors any mind at all: but sitting as they might sit another hundred years, absorbing the thoughts of all the outside worlds.

As surely as they knew that each night the sun descended, stained and tired, to be refreshed and re-

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furbished in the fires of Lower Hell, so they knew that their new companion was older by far than any living man was old . . . perhaps older than calculation. But they knew it as men know a thing which belongs to the realm of wisdom, as, for one, men know that to lie with a strange woman and spend one's seed in her is bad, because with this seed she may make strong and malign witcheries: but as for the spontaneous sense of the moment, one knows that to lie with a woman and to spend one's seed in her is good. So, by wisdom, they knew that Wendólin was a wizard, and very old; but only Arntenas Arnten had seen him as a barely viable bundle in the cave, and even he would need strain to acknowledge that the Wendólin who moved and walked and shyly smiled among them was that same being. Nor did he strain. Nor did the wisdom fact remain forever and always in their minds: they had seen him as a stripling lad, thus they saw him now, he did not change before their eyes, and so he did not change in their minds.

And on this subject once old Bab said to his great-nephew, "There must be some deep reason why his shape and semblance is thus: and I incline to think that tis because this is his real nature."

And no more was said or thought on it. Wendólin had no beard upon his face, but then, till recently, neither had Corm; this did not distinguish him in any ill sense, and neither did his grey-green eyes, his somewhat dark countenance, his clothes of russet leather. From what beast his clothes had come, or who had gathered the bark to tan them, or when, none of them to be sure knew. But then, no one cared. "I know a quicker way out," he said, easily, in his clear, free voice. And they were glad that he did, and they followed him without concern. His words proved true; he led them through a cleft in the gaunt grey cliffs, out into the Nameless Land of woods and grass and streams which lay aside to Wizardland. And they breathed a relieved breath, and smiled on him, and touched his arm. His own smile was a trace less shy. He was now one of them, it seemed. And all had an unspoken feeling that their number was now complete.

And they killed game, and ate of it, and they ate of fruit and berries and of greens.

It was as they stood by a stand of berry-canes, with no great thought upon them more than to avoid the thorns, that one clear and distant sound came to their ears, and then Roke grew a bit white, and he lay his hands upon his scars. And for a moment the blood of the berries seemed as though it were his own blood.

He said, "That is surely the voice of Spear-Teeth. Am I to go and kill him now? Or to be killed by him

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again, this time for true and ever? Does no one know?"

Carefully they snuffed up the breeze, as though the faint sound they made in doing so would be heard, and to their danger. Over the green scent of growing things there lay the heavy and dangerous must-smell of the great mammont. And they were all still, the berries still between the cusps of their teeth.

"Oh, perhaps neither of those," said Wendólin. "I think it is none of those," he said, his manner seeming easy, though a somewhat grave. His trifle smile slightly spread red lips. "But before this Bear and I go to see what Big One has to say to us, I think," he said, softly but not fearfully, "I think we will eat some more good berries. It is long since I have eaten such," he said. And his manner as he stripped the withes was as simple and hearty as that of any boy who feasts himself with berries after a long dearth of them. And Arnten did the same.

Slowly the whiteness in Roke's face diminished. He looked at his new friend all clad in russet with some slight surprise and admiration. "Then I am not to see him now," he said, low-voiced, and slightly indistinct. He moved his tongue and seemed bemused to find berry mashed upon it, and he swallowed. "Mmmm . . . It be a different thing for thee, Wendo," he said—for they had spoken of his incomplete dying, and all of that, earlier. "Eh, thee may stand beside him and eat berries and wail thy weirds and stand safe indeed . . .

"But as for me and as for he . . . I feel that when the pair of us come sight to sight, and close, again . . . that one of us must soonly be dead for true and ever." He stood a moment. Then he moved. Said, "But as tis not to now— Then now I'll do as Wendo says. I'll eat berries." And he gave a sudden snort of laughter and his head a good shake. And he ate more berries.

By and by Arnten felt his body give a great impatient twitch and he grunted and laid his heavy hand as lightly on Wendólin's slight shoulder as he could, and gave him a little push. Wendólin with a rueful, laughing look, but with no word, reached for one last, large berry, did not reach to it, and so the two of them departed from the rest.

The great roan mammont trumpeted when he saw them emerge out of the bosque, and swung round, shambled off. The open ground was broken and irregular, and often he was out of sight. Once they overwalked a tuft of his fleece upon a thorn-bush, and once they bypassed a huge pile of his steaming dung. Once the wind shifted and they paused, and he sounded again, as though impatiently, and they followed in the direction of his call.

Arnten asked, "Have you also received the thoughts of Spear-Teeth?"

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"Oh yes."

"What are they like?"

"Mostly they are heavy and hairy. And sometimes they are steamy and dungy."

Arnten rumbled a laugh in his big, shaggy chest. It did seem somewhat strange to be following after the great mammont, instead of trying to avoid it; and they did not even intend to try to kill it. But the strange was now the usual, the usual had become so strange by former standards that . . . that what? He sought a short thought to sum it all up, found none. He was like a man who settles into a steady run and no longer pauses to consider what a thing looks like when one slowly skulks around it. For years he had skulked around the events in life, well, that had not been his own choice; but now he was in effect running—though in fact he now at this moment walked—running with head thrown back and chest thrown out and feeling the wind and taking the wind in and feeling the growth and play of his muscles and the expansion of his thoughts.

"This would have been his mate," said Wendólin. There was nothing to show them—or, if there was, Arnten did not observe nor Wendólin point out—what had caused this other mammont's death. But beasts had gnawed clean its bones, and it must have been a long and ample feast for them. And there were even teeth marks on the stump of tusk which protruded from the socketed skull on the upper side. "Not this," said Wendólin. His hands brushed aside grasses, found something barely sticking above the surface of the ground, said, pointing, "This. Take it up, brother."

Arnten reached, seized, tugged, grunted, drew forth the lower end of the dead mammont's tusk.

"'This' . . .?"

Wendólin had already turned and started back. He said, without turning, "That is for Fireborn. His haft."

The others marvelled and murmured much on seeing the ivory. But he all clad in russet merely smiled shyly and crammed his mouth with berries.

II

ONE OTHER NEW THING stayed much in Arnten's mind. On another day, and days later, when they had begun to see from time to time the rising smokes of men's places, and turned wide aside to avoid them—he and Wendólin had gone off again together, and then Arn had begun to think deep, bearish thoughts. After a while he saw that he was alone, and so sank back into his thoughts. Then slowly rose from them again. Heard faint voices. Odd sounds. There seemed a new strangeness in the air, scents fa-

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miliar and yet not so. Walking softly, softly, he saw Wendólin in the soft grasses, bare of skin, arms and legs spread out upon the ground. Yet stranger: Wendólin seemed to have doubled, for, beneath him, and very next to the grassy ground, was a second Wendólin: one, face down; one, face up: face to face, arms to arms, body to body, legs to legs.

As Arn stood in full astonishment the lower face twisted and one of the lower eyes turned and saw him. And at that the awesome stillness of the scene was shattered and the lower body struggled its way out from the upper, there was a scramble of limbs, a body leaped to its feet and Arnten saw it was that of a woman, with visible breasts. *Is Wendólin, then—?* his mind groped for understanding. Then, as one body fled, still silent, the other turned over and it met his eyes and it laughed a little. *It* was Wendólin, *this* was Wendólin. Smiling his still slightly shy smile and without haste or shame or alarm, he reached slowly for his clothes. "When I am among men," he said, "I do as men do." And, indeed, he was made full as other men be made.

Many thoughts rocketed like startled birds in Arnten's mind. He felt a host of urges, changes starting in his flesh, and almost he turned to pursue after the fled girl. Then he asked, "Do you not fear, then, that when your seed flows from her she will take some upon a leaf or two and save it away in her witchery-things for working a later malevolence upon you?"

"No," said Wendólin, shortly and easily, sliding his legs into his breeches. His smile he stowed away and faced Arnten face to face. "And neither need you," he said.

"This I will remember," said Arnten slowly. Later on he would reflect and endeavor to find out if this meant that no men need really fear such a thing (when all men he knew did indeed fear it), or if he, Arnten, by virtue of his bearhood or his wizard-friend's remark, need not. But now he said, "Then what of this as has been heard by me more than once, that *One queen is every queen*—"

"Ah, that is quite a different thing. Beware, indeed, of queens, for indeed One queen *is* every queen. And yet, though every queen be a she, not every she be a queen . . ."

He was clothed now and as before, except for a flush in his cheek and a sparkle in his eye, and — yes—his lips were fuller, redder; Wendólin said, "But only, friend, *Beware*. Not to tremble, nor forget your strength nor wisdom, but merely to beware. Be wary."

And Arnten, still strongly confused by new thoughts and things, not understanding by half or half of half, slowly repeated, "This I will remember."

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CHAPTER EIGHT

ARNTEN KNEW that all were cautious on his behalf, knew it and knew it to be well that they were. For him and for his cause they had all, in part at least, left the known for the unknown and the secure for the perilous. And to the extent that they had not, to that extent they counted on him to bring better in the stead of worse. Did they not represent all the Land of Thule which was not represented by himself? *"Our thing is the Thing of Thule: our matter is the Matter of Thule."* In a way it behooved him to be in the lead and for them to follow; in another way it behooved the others to precede him and be a-watch on his behalf for danger.

He could see both clearly, but he could not clearly come to terms with both. As he felt himself grow in bodily stature, so he believed with certainty which was almost absolute that he was also growing in experience and hence in wisdom as well. And there were times when he had to be by himself and it seemed he felt the need more and more often, and it seemed, as well, the more he believed it the less the others were willing to accord it him.

"To be cautious is one thing," he growled. "to be fearful of being by yourselves, another." And when he saw them gaze at him with distress upon their faces and words upon their lips, he—not least because he thought that perhaps there might be in words a wise distress he cared not to hearken to—he said, flatly, "I am not to be followed. *Bide*," and was off, long strides, heavy and hairy arms a-swing. And looked not back.

What was the plan? He would go and think upon the plan and be free to mutter aloud, yes. What plan? Would Fireborn come to him . . . to them . . . piece by piece and bit by bit . . .? Was he in some way to urge, perhaps to force, or surely at least by some act of his own purposefulness, to *bring* Fireborn to him? He was tired of this drifting through the wooded lands like a leaf among leaves. Hiding, when he was ready for confrontation. Whispering, when prepared for the shout of battlecry. Lurking, slinking: when a increasing tremor in his heart and blood shouted to him to rush forward. To rush forward upon this lowbuilt and widespreading mansion suddenly now before him in the dark timbers of the wood, to impress himself upon and to make visible his mark, as footprints in dark sand, as a brand upon a hide or balk. An axe cleaving wood. Or cleaving flesh. To cleave, himself, the yielding flesh which waited for and sang to him.

Half his mind was turned, intent, into and upon itself the while he considered the mansion within the enclosure within the bosky darkness

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of the dale; and half his mind considered only it and what might be inside, ignoring anything, everything else. He could not even recall at what moment he first had noticed it, or what thoughts first came to him concerning it. The guards and the thralls of whoever held the place moved to and from between house and wall and their livery was yellow and brown. He saw them moving vessels of drink, and his tongue moved and his throat; he watched them toting lugs of food, and his teeth champed and his belly growled. He saw the small spears and he scorned them. The man of this place was gone, he knew, he knew, he knew.

It was almost as though he had but stood tall and straight and planted his legs aspread on the forest path and the house to him came swimming, the soft startled murmur of its folk subsiding as they all approached. He flexed his hands and waited for a spear to move his way, but the spearbearers bowed low before him. Servants walked backwards as he approached, gesturing him onward.

"Who keeps this place?" he asked.

"*Within,*" they murmured, murmuring low: "*within, within, within, within, within, within, within, within, within, within.*"

He passed through many chambers and observed the industry of the thralls and the neatness and the richness of all.

"Whither do you take me?" he asked, in mock bemusement at the multitude of the rooms.

"*Within,*" they murmured, murmuring low: "*within, within, within, within, within, within, within, within, within, within.*"

Spearpoints down, they surrounded him; heads bowed low, they compassed him about. "*Without—*"

How sweet and rich this voice. How beautiful the gesture of her arm as she motioned to her guards and servantry to keep outside, and to him, to enter. Wide was this chamber indeed and dim and deeply scented and upon a divan upon a dais she reclined and slowly, slowly, she arose and she looked level eye to level eye at him as he approached. No slim sprig of a greenwood shrub was this, but a heavy bough all in fruit and all in flower. With much gold and with amber was she adorned, and "Do you know me now?" she asked.

He bowed. "The Woman of the Woods, for true."

"You do," she said. "You do. You do."

There were some men, if so one could or would call them, some several fat boys with lustrous eyes and sleek soft flesh, cowering and clustering about the dais. He looked at them one hot flash of a look and they, asulk, slunk away, taking care to tote away with them

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their furs and their sweets and their silky-softy gay array of robes: her loverboys. Ah well. Ah well. Now he was here. Was it not time? Was it not time? Past time . . . . .

And she, as slowly she sank back and down awaiting him, murmured, murmured, murmured low, low, low, ". . . be sparing of your teeth, your claws, be not swift to crush with your embrace, O Bear, O Bear, O Bear . . ."

His heart was like a mighty hammer upon a red-hot forge.

He heard the heavy blow and he felt the heat and he dimly saw her lift the stoup of mead for him to drink, as though to give him yet more sweetness and more zeal, as though either would be a-lack, he heard, he heard, he stooped his mouth to take the drink, his eyes did not leave hers, his hands groped for hers, he heard the wild swans and he heard their trumpets and he heard the bugles of the elks and the baying of the wild things abroad and he lifted his head in dread and saw the servants saw the guards drawing close acrouch with spears between their legs as though he might not see and he saw her a queen and he saw her as the queen of all the bees and he heard the raging murmur of her workers and her warriors and the faint death-moans of her drones and he saw that she knew now that he knew and he dashed her honeydrink to the ground and he turned and struck out and fled and trampled and then he was without, he was outside, he was alone, he was not alone, he sobbed his frustrated lust and he sobbed his pain and he felt the stings and he saw the company of his friends and saw in their eyes relief and grief and saw All-caller sink away from the distended cheeks of Corm—

"Why let ye me not—" he panted. "Have I not a right—?"

And overhead he heard, beyond his reach, the bees, the bees, forever enemy of the bears, forever now to spy upon him, forever. The salmon dies after spawning, the weresalmon, undines; the loverbee is stung to death, the death of the drone, after mating with the queenbee. *One queen is every queen . . .*

"Be not too fierce against us, Bear," said Roke, diffident and low, regretful. "Thy weird is not ours, ours is not thine: a merry dallying for us can be death for thee. Thy weird is otherwise, and the time of that for thee is not this . . . and not yet . . . not yet."

II

AND THAT NIGHT he prepared himself for a dream and in that dream he saw what it was that he must do. Moon-dawn brightened the sky as he awoke and sought in the medicine-bundles for the things of need, and then he left them all

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wrapped in their pelts and in sleep, and his feet made no sound as they flatly pressed the earth and the grass already wet from the first dew, shining brightly in the light of the moon-maid's lamp. His eyes scanned grass for long and far and then he saw that heaped-up pile of it which signified his first stop. And he set his snares and he said his spells and he sat in the tree and he watched. And he waited. And he waited, and he watched.

III

"ALL HARES are my hares," she said.

"And one queen does for all queens," he said.

"You think all ill of me . . ."

"Persuade me not to . . ."

She sat, her feet thrust under her: again, all in blue. "You sought the hare. You caught the hare. You set free the hare and you sent the hare to me, from you. In what way, then, have you yet to be persuaded?"

"In that way by which you think I think all ill of you."

"And again will that fey horn come soon a-sounding, to fill your ears with witchery and your eyes with witchery and send you fleeing me with fear and with rage and hate?"

He shook his head, his head all glowing with the drops of night, all glowing in the silver lamp. "He who sounds the horn, and all of them, lie sleeping still and will not wake till I bid them wake: but that same spell which keeps them sleep also keeps them safe."

"I desire nothing of them, nor ill nor well do I wish them."

He looked at her, ageless and cool, serene and without rage and he recollected whence she had come. "Why have you sent for me?" she asked. "I am not used to being sent for, as well you must know."

Arnten said, "Clearly I cannot go to you with the same safety by which you came to me. Otherwise — It was not to glee myself with the thought of, 'Ah, and though she be whom she be, yet I did but send and she did come to me.'"

She said, "I know."

And so he knew that she did and he knew then that there was no need for any speech but the flat truth which lies at the base of all things without exception, in some cases to support them and in others to destroy them. And so he came somewhat closer and looked upon her grave beauty and he said, "I had begun to be the true me when I fled away from my childhood. And when I gained me the companions whom I now have, then I thought that they were also for me. And now increasingly I feel that they are for a something of which I am only a part, and this late time it has been seen by me that it is not enough. I

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feel like one dancing on a rope while a drum or tambour is tapped and rattled: though all look at him and though all laugh and applaud and though one who has never seen the sight may think that the bear does dance because it is his wish, yet it is not so. And I have sent for you to see if we cannot cut this rope. For you in your way are also tied at a rope."

She said, "Yes."

She said, "And now I do see that it is one rope which ties us and which yet has kept us apart. Young for your father was I, and old for you be I: yet perhaps in neither case it need be so. He was much. He was great. Also, he was stubborn, he could not be moved more than can be moved some great stone boulder. Because you are younger you may be supple if you choose. I said to him, 'We do not need to stay and struggle. I have those ships of which you know and they have rich cargoes of which you know and they be at rest in that portlet and harbor of which you know. Let us twain depart and delight together and visit that other moiety of all the world which lies beyond Thule across the All-Circling Sea.' And he said: 'Delight indeed would that be. But my true delight will be to slay that Wolf.' —Feel you so?"

He looked deep, deep into her eyes, said, "No." Said, "I cared nothing for that Wolf, save that he stood between me and my life. Then my father's death . . . But now of this late time I know that more important to me than my father's death is his son's life. And so it is that I have come to see that I may well have another life than this one of hunt and flee, of hide and sleep, of seek to slay. Now, and if I stripped that Wolf's skin from off him. Now, and if I became King of Farthest Thule instead of him. Now, and of whom would I be king? Of them that stoned me, of them that bound me, of all them, being them who are as I am in any case at all. Ah, and I am plain man enough to think 'twould be delight to punish them and all of that. But not forever. Not even for long.

"And as regards my friends, are they friends of me indeed? Or of my magic? If I am to be me indeed, and only that, then I am not able to continue being my father's son and being one who is ever to be summoned by my father's horn. Perhaps summoned from peril; true. But perhaps I could by myself defeat that peril.

"Woman!" His voice rang in the silent circle lit by the glimmering moon-maid's lamplight. "Hare!"

She was as cool, serene, as the moon-maid herself. Then as he watched her she grew less so. Her face moved as a true woman's face moves, and changes, and her head sank upon her breast and then she lifted her head again and he saw her

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tears. " 'Woman!' " she said, in a voice which trembled. "It is long since I have been woman . . ."

He took her arms in his hands and said, his voice low, but rough and strong. "You will be woman now. And I will be man."

And he saw her as a woman only, and never as a queen, and he saw her as a woman only, and never as a hare. She changed, but she did not change to that. Her body was all silver, naked in the moonlight, but her voice in his ear was all gold. Without, she glimmered like silver; within, she flowed like molten gold. She moved beneath him and he moved upon her and they filled and they encompassed one another. In a way it was like entering the bear-death and in all other ways it was nothing like that and nothing like anything else. The sun rose with her and within him and wheeled about in fiery light and the voice he heard in his ears was mightier than any voice of All-caller. And he was himself and all for himself, as he was all for her, as she was all for him: as no one and as nothing had ever been before.

Later, as he kissed her ears and eyes, her lips and breasts and belly, he thought of the old belief that the lovemaking of the bear does last nine days. And he knew this now to be not so. But was withal well content.

CHAPTER NINE

THEY SLEPT the waning night away wrapped in each other's arms. Dawn found them so, that bride of the locust which does eat up all our days. But no man thinks of that when he is young and in delight of the delights of youth, and it is well that this is so. She did not look old to him in the sunlight, anymore than she had by the shining silver shield of the night. Green was their bed and surrounded by an almost full oval line of trees where a meandering riverlet had transcribed a not-quite-island, along which the deep tap-roots drank their fill at whatsoever season of the year. Once, at least, the course of the stream had shifted, and left as token of that ancient change a place where there was sand.

"Look you, Arnten," she said, as he sat up and then got to his feet and walked over to join her; "look you," she said, beginning to draw in the sand with a sharp-broken stick. "Here is where we are, in this little oval. And," she raised her ivory hand and the wand in it and moved it a distance and dipped it and drew another line, and this one with an indentation—"this is the safe harbor of which I spoke, by the All-Circling sea. And this stream here, " she gestured, "leads into another, and this," she paused in her speech but her hand flew swiftly, deftly, surely.

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II

MERRED-DELFIN endeavored almost desperately to show the King, by means of signs which he scratched and lines which he drew. But the King, weak, and King, weary, the King so wan of hope and spent—it seemed—of wit—the King could not follow. The Chief Witcherer, his face drawn taut as a drum-head by pain and wasting illness, Merred-delfin made squawking noises in his throat and chest, he made buzzing sounds with his thin, parched lips.

The Orfas looked at him with dull, glazed eyes. *"Iron dies,"* he muttered, *"Iron is the Matter of the King, and as iron dies, so dies the King . . ."*

The Chief Witcherer buzzed and squawked, caught the border of the King's robes when his master made as though to lie down again, his eyes leaving the box of sand in which the other made his signs and drew his lines. At length the Orfas, his face hot and sore with the red scurf which disfigured it, and his hands and all his skin as well, the Orfas groaned and half-rose and called in a voice louder than his wont, but a voice a ghost of his former voice. And from behind the reed curtain a voice answered.

"Call the Queen," the Orfas said, falling back upon his down pouches and his fleecy coverlets. "Call the Queen . . . Aye, Merred, Merred, you weary me, and to what end, when there is but one end certain and that is that I must die? . . . Well, call the Queen, and let her interpret, if she can. And if not, let her comfort me . . . as much as any can. Aye. So," his voice sank low, his eyes turned up. "Call the Queen . . . call the Queen . . . call the Queen . . ."

III

THE SUN BEAT DOWN upon the black spot which was last night's camp-fire, but Bab slept on as though it were still night. The sun passed over Roke's white skin but though it tarried it semed not to burn that pale integument. The sun moved its beams along Corm's sallow face and closed eyes, but the eyes did not open. Only Wendólin seemed to sense the sun. Wendólin muttered, lightly, as though asking some riddle in his sleep. Then his face twitched, and he sat bolt upright and gazed around in astonishment. He stooped after a moment and assayed the angle of the sun. "So," he said. "Then he has disengaged himself from us. Well, is it not all the same to me? Let me then get me gone." And he had half risen to his feet and his hands were still flat upon the ground and he frowned as he saw the others. Then he was up, and sighing, and smoothing his garments.

"All the same," he said, "One

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way or one other way. Then, so, not the way which would mean leaving these here alone." He sighed, he went and set his hand into the old Bab's bundle and withdrew a handful of twigs dried with the leaves still on them and the flowers still in place. He found no flame in the fire and so he made fire afresh and then he set this withered bouquet against a coal and whirled it round his head and then he walked thrice round the circle in the whirling smoke, chanting his chant. Then he dropped the smoldering herbs and spat three times upon them. And then he picked them up and cast them into the fire and next he drew open his breeks and made his water upon the fire. And ere it had ceased to sizzle and to steam, the three others had sat them up and were looking round about in puzzlement, indeed.

Then, "Where is Bear?" one asked.

"That indeed I know not," said Wendólin, a trifle sadly. "But I know that no common sleep it was which held us all fast-bound here until almost noon, the Time of No Shadow. Had it reached till then— Well, I know not. But such a deep sleep . . . Who indeed knows the Witchery of Sleep better than the Bear? Eh?"

The eyes of the others met his own, met each other's, fell. At length, said Roke, "Bear or no, huge or no, still he be but boy."

And his old uncle nodded, and said, more than a trifle sadly, "It may be that his strength came upon him too swift, too soon," the old man said, with a deep sigh. "A happy childhood and a happy young manhood, he never had: but as a mere cub he was cast into a whirlpool, and he has yet to reach safe shore."

And Corm said nothing, but his mouth settled and his hands reached for All-caller and he placed the great fey Horn to his lips and his cheeks swelled and his lips trembled—

But no sound came out. Helplessly, he offered it to Roke, a flush upon his cheek. But Roke shrank away from it. And then Bab and Wendólin examined it, and then one said, "Ah," and one said, "Oh," and from inside the huge horn which an huger aurochs had once born aloft through every forest in Farthest Thule they extracted a small wad or mass of fur or soft hair or—

"Then what is it?" asked Corm.

Roke gave it a fearful look, then his face cleared and he half-laughed. "Why, tis no witchery but just a jape of sorts," he said, flinging aside his yellow hair to crane for a closer look. "I know it be but the scut of a hare: know ye not that, all?"

Wendólin and Bab nodded, but did not laugh. Corm chuckled, at first in relief, but his relief but

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echoed Roke's; then puzzlement returned. "What means this, then?" he asked. "And where is your sister's grandchild, Old Shaman? Did he bewitch us, true? And why? And what is it that we must do?"

There was a silence, and Roke laughed no more, but a color came and went in his skin and for a moment it left the Sign of the Bear outlined upon his scarred breast. "Do? Why—we must follow after and face him, then, and ask what it is he mean, and what it is he do not mean: for if he mean to leave we lone and lorn in this Land of Thule, then we be but dead men, all, so long as we do tarry in this Land of Thule."

No one said him nay. And then he spoke again, saying, "And I understand it not, but that I have already died once here, and before I die again, why, I will get me—somehow!—away from this fell Land of Thule . . .

"If so be that I must swim cross the All-Circling Sea myself."

IV

AND LATER they came to an oval-shaped greensward with a bald of sand in about the center of the lower part of it and this had been much scratched with a stick, it seemed. And at the sight of this both Bab and Wendólin uttered short cries, stilled at once, and they squatted by this bit of sand, and muttered and made witcheries and waved the scut of the hare to the six directions: then Wendólin crouched over and blew and blew, gently, so, so, so, he gently blew, and grain by grain the sand moved: and behind his moving head moved the moving hand of old Bab, grey-white with the white-grey ash the hand bore, scattering ash, letting it sift slowly down, slow, so, slow, so, so . . .

"A map!" Corm exclaimed, in wonder.

"By this trail moved the Bear," old Bab began, when—! A sound which was not a sound was not so much heard as felt, in their inner ears and on the outer air. And Roke, uneasy: "What was that?"

And Wendólin: "That was the intended breaking of the spell which I broke earlier, else we had all still been there where we were last night. So, then, that at least is well, that he did not intend us to remain bewitched there forever and until the snows froze us or the spotted ounces dug us from the snow for their food."

Said Roke, slowly, his fingers fretting upon his scars and the weals of his wounds, "That is well, then, yes. But it will be weller when we can look him face to face and ask: Be you man or bear or boy: and what do you mean for us, whichever?"

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V

"YOU ARE MY WOMAN, then," said Arnten, taking her by the arms and turning her about to face him. Her face had been calm and now it seemed suffused with joy; it had been pale and now it took on the faint, faint color of the wild rose.

"I am yours," she said.

"And I may take and have you when I want," he said, speaking with a roughness which he was far from feeling.

"I am yours in all things and at all times," she said.

He said, still rough, but his voice now and then loosening into a tremor, "Then I will have you now, and here and now, and they had better not come spying on me or calling me, or—"

But her mouth was on his and he forgot what he had intended to threaten.

Afterwards he said, intending to sound scornful but instead sounding only happy, "Well, and am I better than that rusty old wolf?" She hid her face against him and gently took his skin between her teeth. Then she released him and she nodded. Swiftly looked up, a sheen upon her own skin, swiftly nodded again, shyly smiled; again hid her face. "And," he asked, boldly, defiantly, and again would-be-scornfully and happily, "And does he shoot rusty loads as well?"

She leaned her head up towards his, her neck stretching, and he bent down to kiss one pulse which trembled in the hollow of her throat and she jumped and gasped and then he bent his head still lower and he heard her whisper in his ear and he raised his head and his throat swelled with his howl of triumphant laughter.

"What? None at all?" he bellowed. And her face lit up with a glee which he had never before seen and perhaps few others had ever seen it either, and she nodded: and he laughed again. And again. And he crushed her in his arms, and he laughed, and he laughed, and he laughed.

CHAPTER TEN

MERRED-DELPHIN heard her laughing, as he moved slowly down from the north. He made signs, and the captains of the King's Men nodded.

Wendólin and Corm and Roke and Bab heard it, approaching with stealth from the west.

She laughed there upon the deck of the largest of her three vessels in the hidden cove. She had sent the sailingmen away a distance, to the south. They were strange to Arnten's eyes; those twenty men, squat and strong, with shiny black hair and grey eyes and tiny rings in their ears: they had bowed down at the sight of her. And then they had talked, swift-worded, together, and

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then they all bowed down to him. And then she had sent them a distance away, to the south.

"They will return before dawn tomorrow," she said.

"So."

"I should have wished to go now, even now, even before now. But they said twas best to take the dawn-tide."

He said, "So," and spread fleeces on the deck and snuffed up the scent of land and of river and of sea.

"There are good winds at this season, and we shall cross the All-Circling Sea a sooner than you might believe. And then whither, eh?" she asked.

He began to pluck at her garments, he had not yet gained deftness at this, but perhaps she preferred it so. Certainly she preferred to pretend that she knew not what he was about. And as he fumbled, she asked, "Shall we intend for the nearest port and sell our furs and amber and ivory and gold at heavy prices, it having been long since any treasure cargoes have reached there from hence?"

"My treasure-cargo is here," he muttered. And tugged. And, she not moving, he lifted her up with a sigh of impatience, and tugged and slipped the clinging cloth away, and then he touched her in wonder, and, wondering, watched her touch him.

And she had laughed, exulting.

They heard her laugh, the sailingmen, a distance away to the south, and they grinned at each other and they ate their roasts of the wild sheep which they had hunted: and next they cast the shoulder-blades of the sheep upon the fire: and watched the omen-telling cracks appear: and then they pulled long faces and they shook their heads. And they examined their weapons by the firelight and in the gathering dusk, exclaimed at the tell-tale signs of the iron pox which afflicted this odd, strange land of Thule: and they muttered their relief that they would leave it soon; to be exact, at next dawn-tide. And then they glanced again at the cracked shoulder-blades and again they shook their heads.

II

So it was that, as the two lovers lay upon their bed upon the deck of the ship, their fingers and the locks of their hair twining together and watching the pale stars come to peer through the veil of night and minding not the first faint fall of dew, that a one or two things made them pause. He felt her grow tense. He sat upright, growling.

She said, "What—"

He said, "Did you hear it, too? It is that one called Corm, he knew me as I was a boy, and remains but still a boy himself, and thinks—they all think—that I am yet to be controlled as one controls a boy . . ."

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She said, "What—"

He said, "It is that horn of my father's which I let Corm bear for me and so he may think tis his, which tis not, the horn called *Fey*, called *All-caller*—"

She said, "Ahhh . . ."

"And now he dares not blow it full, but his lips breathe a riff of air into its mouth, and that is what I hear, and it fills me full with rage: that still they follow after me and will not let me be free. They come. They are near."

And she said, "Did I not speak to my own sailingmen, bidding them be gone till dawnlight? Yet they approach: Hear."

There was the sound of a strange call of a bird which had never nested in the land of Thule. "Tis their signal," she said. "How do they dare? Is disobedience abroad on every breeze tonight? They come. They are near."

Without other word the two of them dressed themselves and arose and peered into the dimness and the dark. And it seemed that the dim and the darkness peered back at them, and that something moved therein.

Arnten said, grim, and growling in his chest, "I know who you be, your faces I need not see, for I know your tread and I snuff your smell. What, Roke! What, Corm! What, my mother's uncle! And what!—you youngling Nain whose name my tongue would trip upon! And what!—you wizard Wendólin! Listen, all. I am not that bear who may be ringed through the septum of his nose and trained to dance upon the tug of a rope, do thee hear, every which one of thee?"

"Thy weird, Bear," a voice from the night began, slowly.

"My weird!" he cried. "I cry scorn upon my weird as you bethink it! My weird now and for some time syne and for all time hence, my weird be what *I* shall make it. You have pressed and followed me too close with your mumble and your snuffle of *My weird*, *Thy weird*, *His weird*, and *That one's weird*."

"Thy father," another voice began: and he growled more fiercely, even, against this other voice.

"My father, aye! My father, true! My father, so! Woe was upon my father that he suffered his weird to fall into the hands of wizards, Nains, witcherers, and indeed of any in the Land of Thule. He ought never to have returned unto the Land of Thule, and this I shall tell thee all: Does my weird suffer me to escape this Land of Thule, curse me from the day that ever I return to it, as was my father cursed ever from that day that *he* returned to it."

And, soft from the darkness: "Thy father's curse, O Bear, do stand upon the ship beside thee . . ."

"Oh, lie!" she cried—and then the strange bird-call sounded clear,

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and sounded near, and with relief she cupped her hand and called, "Hither, hither, faster, and hither to me!" And the other figures melted back into the bosky and the black, as, by one and by two and three, the squat, stout sailingmen appeared.

"O Mistress," one began.

"I forgive your disobedience," she said, "in returning so long before the time I said: only get you now unto your several ships and hoist the anchor-stones: if there is as yet no wind, no tide, then pole us out at least a way to sea, for—"

And the captain-chief of the small fleet, coming nearer and bowing low, said, "This, Mistress, is what we would hear you say, for on casting the shoulder-blades of the wild sheep into our evening fire, we saw malign configurations appear as the lines of fortune and of weird appeared when the heat o' the fire produced the cracks of predication. Exceeding strange they were, and—"

A sound broke in upon his words, rose upon the shuddering air, ululated, fell away; and twice more was repeated.

"A wolf—"

"The wolf!"

From afar, but yet not far, other men's voices—

"The wolf! The Wolf! The Orfas! King Orfas!" and, *"His men! King's Men! King Orfas!"*, and, *"The Wolf!"* cried Arnten's men.

She said, "To sea— At once, at once— To sea—"

He said, "No, now, not so swift and soon," Arnten said. Arn said, "To sea, and soon, yes. But not so soon that I do not sooner settle what lies between me and this Wolf-King, for as my father—"

And she, hot-swift, her hand clasped on his, and stronger her grip than ever he would have thought, whilst still the howling wolf came nearer and the enemy voices clamored from the wood; she: "Ah, Bear! By my body and by yours! This accursed stubbornness of thy seed and blood! Did I not years gone by beg your father to get us gone together away from Wolf and Thule? And he would tarry and he would fight, and see what that but brought him! And long I'd thought him gone from Thule across the All-Circling Sea without me and I waited, waited, dured long and woefully without him, till the old Chief Smith of all the Nains persuaded me that twas not so that all the Nains were in cabal with him to curse iron that he might then return— And so— And then— So then," her words tumbled in confusion and he tugged, impatient.

She mastered her mouth, and said, clear, "So then I knew he must still be here in Thule, and if none of all our spying has espied him as a man, then— So I had the King's Men sent out—For I asked of the hares and I asked of the

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salmon and the bees, and they told me where, the Bear—"

Now he broke her grip as twas grass, and now he gripped her and he said, low, "So twas thee encompassed his captivity and mine?"

"Only that I might confront him and again offer him—"

"Then twas because of *thee* he died!"

"I never wished him dead, only that he and I might go forever gone, as now I want that thee and I—"

Arn's voice was grim, and his hand tightened upon hers and he said, "Because of *thee* he died: So." And then she cried out, astonishment greater than pain or fear, and pointed, pointed with her free, her other hand. And every voice was stilled, afar as well as near. Then every voice broke loud again, in shock, in fear, in wonder great.

Across the sky from past the dripping stars a fiery spear was hurled, and then after it another, and another, and from every quarter of the sky came fiery spear, arching across the sky and falling, falling, falling, hurling down to earth.

The sailingmen uttered together one sound like the wail of a babe torn brutely from a mother's breast and they fell face down where they had stood, and buried their faces in their arms. But Arn shouted a great high shout of understanding and of triumph, and Corm raised All-caller to his lips, and Wendólin laughed aloud in wizard-glee and Bab danced and croaked and pointed, and even the silent Nain lifted his heavy head and bayed at the sky; and Roke beat his hands upon his breast and stamped with his feet upon the ground. And all the sky was filled with the light of the falling fire-streaks and sound of rumbling and above all of this rose Arn's voice.

"'*When the stars throw down their spears and pelt the earth with thunder-stones*'—See now? See now! See how *the stars throw down their spears*—hear how they *pelt the earth with thunder-stones*—"

One after the other the burning spears hurtled, crashing, into the ground, and Arn marked the quarter of their crashing, noted the section of their fall; and still the angry stars hurled more. Arn took one stride to where the pot of coals rested on sand and on stones and slowly turned to ashes, there safe in its nest at the bow of the ship. And he stepped over her as though she were not there as she lay there, moaning in terror, and he ripped up handfuls of tow and tinder as he strode, and he blew upon the grey embers and saw them flash into light and life. And he snatched at the quiver and the bow. And he called to the Captain-chief of the sailingmen.

Little indeed in those moments did that one think that ever he

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would see again his home across the All-Circling Sea and had no other thought but that he would die, and directly, there in the fell Land of Thule, crushed and burned to death by the fall of heaven—as so he and they, his mates, did think it. But out of the fear and doom and terror of that while a horn sounded and a voice called him by title and there was in that voice somewhat which bade him not tarry. He rose to his feet, he hearkened, half-understanding, he kicked his mates, and they all rose up and went stumbling to the ships.

There was the lover of their Mistress, and he seemed grown exceeding great and he spoke in a voice like the voice of thunder and they noticed now of great sudden that the pelt he wore was the pelt of the bear and it be-thought them how he was very bear indeed and perhaps that same Bear whose stars trod the skies of heaven: he gave them orders, they swarmed up and they obeyed.

"Fire against fire!" he cried. "Shoot up that way! And over there! And over there! Good! Good! As long as arrows and tow and tinder and earth-fire hold out, continue your shooting; and you will indeed see victory—"

They, half-numbly at first, and then with growing zeals, wrapped tow and tinder round their arrows' heads and dipped them in the pot of coals and fired them off whither he, this Bear, had directed. And from the fire-flecked darkness a ways off came cries of terror and alarm, of horror, fright, and flight. For the star-spears fell not that close at all (but Arn and his company marked where they were falling), fell farther off by far from where the King's Men lay huddled in terror. But when the sailingmen shot off their own burning arrows at the sky, why . . . what goeth up must in time come down . . . And come down the shipmen's arrows did. And all about the place where the wolf had howled and where the men of the Wolf had huddled. It was all the same to them: they did not pause to consider if one or if two different kind of fiery missile came down at them from the burning sky. They fled. They left spear and club and every weapon indeed, and they fled. And they howled as they fled. But it was the menacing howl of the great Wolf.

And in a while the time came, as Arn had known it would, that the stars began to slacken in their hurling of fire-spears and of thunder-stones. And when the ships' men saw this, they shouted in fierce triumph, and had no further doubts but that—and thanks to the wisdom of the Bear—they had indeed fought fire with fire. So they shouted and seized fresh arrows and wound tinder and tow about their heads and dipped them in the pot of glowing coals and nocked them into

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their bows and shot them, cursing and gleeing, towards the fleeing stars; shouting to each other and to their Mistress and her leman, this great Bear, that they had put and were still putting the stars to flight: and would soon have them driven back to their own country once and for all.

Arn had not noticed her as she crept across the deck, had not felt her grasp his leg; only now when he turned—without word—to go, did he feel her. And he muttered and would have shaken her loose.

"O Bear! By my body and by yours! Whither do you go? And why?" she begged.

He was of no mind to return reply to this witless question, but it seemed simpler to speak than to grapple. "I was wrong, see you, about my weird," he said. "It lies here in this Land of Thule, it was but slow in coming, slow to show itself," he said. "My weird is iron. See now how the time for the curing of the sickness unto death of iron has arrived? The stars, don't thee see?" he burst out at her—"The stars have cast down spears at earth, and spears be made of iron, yea or nay? Be sure that the stars have no sickness among them. Be sure that we shall cure our iron by means of the fresh, hot, and healthy iron of the star-spears. Be sure—"

She moaned and shook her head. She clung to him. Again he recollected that 'twas she to whom he owed his father's death, but he was not minded yet to savage or to slay her. Was she ravaged with grief and pain? Off and away with her, then! Let her get herself and her hare's scut gone—

"Arntenas, Arnten, Arn!" she cried, clinging to him. "Thy weird be iron, but iron is also the weird of the King! As iron was dying, so was the King dying. And if it be that thee cure iron while he does live, Arnten, Arnten, Arn, do ye not see, all of ye, thee and thy fellows—

"If you cure iron, then you cure the King!"

He stood there, stock-still, his mouth agape, and looked at her. The truth of her words transfixed him. To do and to undo! To repeat it all again, then? Once more to be the enemy and flee the wrath of that kinsman who hated him more than any stranger? Fights and flights and long and weary journeyings . . .

The Captain-chief, nothing heeding (as nothing knowing) of all these words and all these thoughts, half-turned and flung up his head toward the sky, whence fewer and fewer fire-stones came, and they seeming to drift languidly.

"Eh, Master!" cried the Captain-chief. "See how they flee! How folk will give thee ward and worship, then, across the Sea, when we sail in with word of this great night!" And he gave Arn a half-bow, and he turned and shouted and dipped his

(continued on page 81)

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VAMPIRE FROM THE VOID

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

Eric Frank Russel returns to our pages after too long an absence with a quietly effective and archetypically British story about a dust mote fallen from space and its horrible appetite. . .

Illustrated by BILLY GRAHAM

1

DEATH COMES in little parcels. The Black Widow spider, the Hope Diamond and meningococci are fair examples. Death, everlastingly gaunt and hungry, stalks through the realms of the living and strikes at the unwary great through the medium of the small.

That is why no citizens of Liverpool saw the impending fate of a thousand of their fellows come floating down from scowling clouds. That is why a preoccupied myriad bustled beneath descending peril and remained totally unconscious of the arrival of a man from beyond.

Even Doctor Lloyd failed to sense the intimate nearness of submicroscopic hell. He hurried from the big cube of masonry that is the Cunard Building, saw long columns of office lights striving to pierce the veil of fog that lay over Mann Island. Ferryboats squawked raucously on the shrouded river. Somewhere out by the Mersey Bar an incoming liner bellowed like a colossal bull, the noise of its powerful siren echoing and re-echoing through fog, steam and smoke until it died away in faint rumbles far inland. A train fled uproariously along the elevated track, its long string of glowing coaches snaking past illuminated towers that flanked the noisy railroad.

Through the fog and the hubbub sank a tiny speck, a jewelled mote from the vastness of the void. Moisture encased it; the dampness of a

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single, suspended drop that had been encountered within the murky blanket.

Down it went, past the shining dial of a monster clock, past thirty floors of a granite building, past neon lights that flamed garishly above a night-club's door. It drifted toward the sidewalk.

A hurrying figure cut through the line of the invader's descent. The invisible mote made contact, nestled in the fabric on the shoulder of a camelhair coat and was borne along.

Vague unease became paramount in Doctor Lloyd's mind. He tried to push the feeling aside, attributing it to one of those nervous spasms commonplace in these fast and furious days of modern life. There was no weight upon his shoulder, none upon his heart, but there was this sudden apprehension burdening his mind for no obvious reason. It kept coming back as persistently he pushed it away.

He threw a startled glance over his left shoulder as he hastened along, but saw only the tired, robot-like features of following home-seekers. His strong, square jaw jutted an inch above the camelhair as his head twisted around in search of something surreptitiously watching. There was nothing visible to justify his mental fidgets.

Something dree, something dreadful stirred in its ambush near his jugular vein. Opalescent fires became born in the unimaginable depths of a mote itself unperceivably small. Here there was life of a sort; life that moved and schemed and hungered.

Lloyd cast another sharp-eyed glance over his own shoulder. With his attention thus momentarily distracted, he strode straight into a stream of people pouring down the subway entrance to the Mersey Railroad. There was some pushing and shoving. He collided heavily with a big, paunchy man in a black suit and a derby hat.

"I beg your pardon!" said Lloyd, with slight irritation.

Forcing his way out of the crush, he found the traffic lights in his favor and joined a rush of pedestrians across the road.

Now there was nothing on his shoulder and nothing on his mind. His apprehension had gone along with the minute menace that had been shaken from his coat by the shock of encounter. The threat to himself had become a threat to others, a subtle, unseen lurker in a crack between concrete slabs outside the subway.

Traffic lights changed color, street-car gongs chivvied sluggish pedestrians, automobile horns ordered the halt, the maimed and the blind to get the hell out of it. The traffic surged forward in a solid mass, rattling, snoring, sighing, clanging and hooting.

Pausing by the kerb, Doctor

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Lloyd gazed across the road. Puzzlement overlay his lean, muscular features. There was self-query in his expression. He saw the subway, the crowd,the scene of his collision. Then, suddenly, his face went taut, his eyes registered incredulity.

A long, lean man paused outside the subway and bought a newspaper. He fumbled for money while the vendor watched him with idle indifference. There came a swift, upward belch of blazing crimson that appeared and disappeared with such astounding rapidity that only visual retention permitted it to register on the sight. It came and went, *ftt*!, like that. The lean man went with it. Not with a whimper, but with the bang of an implosion. A nearby window fell outward, glass shards spattered around.

The surrounding crowd swirled and fluttered like a flock of scared starlings. A girl screamed on a note far higher than she could reach without the aid of utter, soulsearing terror.

Risking the traffic, Lloyd raced back across the road, his deft feet carrying him past half a dozen vehicles that swerved with screeching brakes. He gained the entrance to the Mersey Railroad.

The newsvendor was dead, his papers scattered around his sprawling body. White eyes bulged in ghastly contrast with a face fried deep red as if by violent sunburn. The right arm that had been outstretched to receive the coins was now missing; it had been sheared off above the elbow and the stump was charred.

A small, dapper man joined Lloyd and gaped at the corpse of the newsvendor. His pasty face went still paler as he noted the mutilated limb. He had the garrulity of the semi-hysterical.

"That other fellow," he chattered, waving his hands around. "There was another guy. I saw him buying a paper." He pointed to the fateful spot and did a nervous little dance. "Right there. He was right there. I saw him myself."

"So did I," said Lloyd. "But he's gone." He frowned at the growing ring of spectators, noticed that somebody had raced into a nearby phone-booth and presumably was calling the police. "Gone God alone knows where."

"But people can't vanish like that," protested the other. "They just can't."

"So it seems," commented Lloyd, dryly.

The little man could find no effective answer to that. He repeated his fidgety dance, licked his lips, managed to look both frightened and aggrieved.

Lloyd said, "If you saw what happened you'd better stay put until the cops arrive. They'll need all the witnesses they can get."

"Sure!" More lip-licking. "They'll want to know about it. How that fellow was right there. . .

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and then he wasn't." His scared gaze flickered over the circle of onlookers. It had not yet occurred to him that what can happen once can happen twice, but he was all set to go into orbit immediately the idea did register.

Calmly, Lloyd walked to the head of the corpse, bent over it and looked at its upturned eyes. Squatting on his heels, he lifted the eyelids to gain full view of the pupils. The examination was too perfunctory to be informative. It was well-nigh impossible to tell exactly how death had struck. A post-mortem might prove revealing.

This was a riddle of the first order. Death and a vanishing at one fell stroke, with no rational explanation for either. Something must have done it; to suppose that such an effect could arise without cause was absurd. Definitely there must be a cause lurking around . . . lurking around . . .

The horrible thought sent an electric tingle up Lloyd's spine. Whatever had done this could do it again. His apprehensive glance shot towards the small man. He made to utter a warning but was too late.

Hell flung open its gates with dumbfounding swiftness and the little man fell right in. One elusive but ferocious spurt of crimson, that seemed to balloon and burst almost instantaneously, caught the watchers napping.

A sharp, hard crack like the breaking of a soundbarrier signalled that the second victim had gone the way of the first. The crowd of witnesses stared stupidly for the space of half a minute, their wits addled by the seeming impossibility of the happening.

Then the audience woke up and reached complete unanimity. Each person conceived exactly the same idea: whoever waits long enough is going to be next. Each had an emphatic lack of desire to sacrifice himself, even for the sake of science. The circle of onlookers abruptly dissolved, poured down the subway in a mad scramble and left Lloyd to himself.

II

HE WAS STILL THERE when a police cruiser pulled into the kerb and two uniformed figures heaved themselves out of it. The first of the pair, a burly, keen-eyed individual, stamped across the sidewalk, gazed with weary impassivity at the dead newsvendor, turned his attention to Lloyd.

"What happened, Doc?"

"Darned if I know." Lloyd looked seriously at Captain Henderson, whom he knew of old. "I saw this character die. But it beats me how. Something mighty queer took place."

"Humph!" Henderson's face was emotionless. He had the air of a man who has seen everything and

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has little capacity for surprise. "Were you the only witness?"

"No." With a rapid flow of words, Lloyd gave full description of what had taken place, finishing, "A good many others in the crowd must have seen the whole thing from first to last, but they took to their heels along with the rest."

"And where were the two vanishers standing?"

"There." Stepping a few paces forward, Lloyd pointed to the fateful spot. "In their frenzy of fear a dozen people ran right over the same place but nothing happened to any of them."

"I'll call the wagon and have this cadaver taken away." Casting a glance of distaste at the indicated danger-point, Henderson went to the cruiser and made his call. Returning, he growled, "Well, I guess everything is as clear as mud. We've a murder and a couple of kidnapings on our hands. And we know exactly what did it. To wit: a big crimson flash."

"Sorry," said Lloyd. "I can't tell you any more."

"All we have to do," Henderson went on, "is arrest a momentary flame and slap a bunch of charges on it." He sighed, long and deeply. "I think you'd better come along and make a statement."

"I'll be glad to do that," agreed Doctor Lloyd.

Following the other to the waiting car, he climbed into the back. Henderson took a front seat, stuffed his pipe with coarse tobacco, lit it, tamped it down with his thumb, applied the match again.

They sat in complete silence for a couple of minutes, then Henderson said, "Damn!" He planted a thick finger on the wheel-button and let the siren moan. "Someday I'll fire Grogan." The siren wailed like a lost soul.

The driver erupted from the subway, pounded toward the car and scrambled in. Henderson scowled at the rear-view mirror. Grogan played with switches and the car leaped away from the kerb like a startled kangaroo. The two passengers were pressed back in their seats.

"Sorry I was slow," said Grogan, looking unconvincingly contrite. "I just went down to the cigar shop."

"Where there's an overweight blonde," growled Henderson, disgustedly.

"She's my sister-in-law." Grogan waxed enthusiastic. "A stunner. She's got everything."

"Except you," reminded Henderson. He addressed Lloyd, "She's his sister-in-law—he says."

Grogan said nothing. Frowning at the inoffensive windshield, he whirled the car around a bend, let it pelt headlong down Dale Street.

"The inter-city limit, Grogan," said Henderson, "is thirty miles an hour. We wouldn't like to get pinched by some smart cop, would

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we?"

The car slowed to a sedate pace. Grogan's frown grew deeper and blacker. He muttered to himself as he swung into the kerb outside Central Police Station.

"He ought to have warned his sister-in-law not to cross that concrete slab," suggested Lloyd, seriously. "Whatever can wipe out of existence a couple of people can equally well dispose of another dozen."

"You think there'll be more victims?" asked Henderson, tensely.

"I'm sure of it." And with that glum prophecy Lloyd go out of the car.

III

THERE WERE SIXTEEN MORE, all taken in the night. In the majority of cases, nobody saw them go. Streets are not lush with witnesses in somber hours of sleep.

A police officer on night patrol lumbered with slow, deliberate stride past West Kirby Station, southern terminus of the Mersey Railroad. He paused outside the silent ticket-office, admired a billboard displaying a life-sized bathing beauty. The damsel protruded a generous bosom and that was his last sight on earth.

A huge ruby eggshell encased him and plopped back into nothingness, taking him with it. One moment he was there, night-stick swinging. The next moment he had flashed out of existence. There was nothing to see save that brief, hungry flare of luridness, nothing to hear but a loud, whip-like crack that set dogs barking and howling for a mile around. The score was up to three.

Twenty minutes later a wandering cat trod daintily on the exact spot and slunk onward unharmed. Its tailed form sneaked through night-time shadows, turned into Banks Road, crossed to the opposite side a hundred yards farther on. Still unharmed, it passed into obscurity.

The feline's path was crossed several times not long afterward. The man was a drunk in the lachrymose stage. He zig-zagged along the sidewalk, reciting true confessions in a slurred tongue as he progressed. Then he stopped and teetered on the kerb.

In his muddled mind he imagined he was about to cross the road. In actual fact, he was about to cross the frontier between the lands of the living and the realms of the rotten.

Putting out one vague, uncertain foot, he took a rubber-legged step forward, then another and another, one, two three, four. Crimson caught him on the fifth. He was encompassed and taken with a speed that an ultra-rapid camera would have been lucky to capture on a single frame.

The vanishing-point became hammered by rubber. A wildly

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whirling tire thumped it, rushed onward at fifty miles an hour, fled through the areas of Moreton and Leasowe to the dormitory town of Wallasey.

In Moreton, a worker coming off night-shift strolled unconcernedly toward the tire's track but never crossed it. Where the humming wheel had been and gone, a man now came and went.

There was one witness of this disappearance—but none to witness his own. Curiosity closed his mouth for ever.

With astonishment on his face and doubt within his eyes, a second and following worker walked into the road and carefully examined the spot where he thought he'd seen a man who was no longer there. He bent enticingly over the area, was enveloped in an instant and thus became the sixth victim.

Two hours before dawn a rat scurried furtively across the road, passed a milk distributing depot and found its way into a bakery. The first milk-truck out of the depot made its early morning rounds in Wallasey. The seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth disappearances all took place in Wallasey.

Death then switched operations to the adjoining city of Birkenhead. Here another patrolling cop met his fate when a madly eager outburst of color nullified him on a corner. Of the horde of early morning workers heading for Cammell Laird's huge shipbuilding yards, five never reached them. They were required to satiate the ghoulish appetite of something that knew nothing of ships or sealing-wax, of cabbages or kings. It knew only of the need to ingest.

Pure coincidence accounted for the presence of Doctor Lloyd when the seventeenth man dropped into the never-never. He saw the whole thing from first to last, yet saw only the very little permitted by sheer, eye-baffling speed.

Pedestrians are not permitted in the big four-track tube that is the Mersey Tunnel. But this fellow afoot was a technician checking the intakes of the air-conditioning plant. Fifty yards ahead of Lloyd's high-whining car, he was crossing the Tunnel's floor, and had reached the inward fast track, when it happened.

His muscular, blue-uniformed figure was a mere dot framed in the Tunnel's great gape. The next instant it was a momentary flare of living, lambent flame. Then it was nothing, absolutely nothing. The completeness and rapidity of his disappearance was a phenomenon fundamentally shocking.

An oncoming truck swerved like a frightened elephant, skidded ponderously on the diamond-treaded steel plates of the Tunnel's floor, slid its twenty-tons bulk from the slow track, across two fast tracks,

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through the contrary slow track and crunched against the guard rails.

Deftly, Lloyd skidded his car around the other even as it struck. He shot past it crabwise, heard the noise of its impact go thundering along the Tunnel's great bore, saw long panels of glass-trim splinter and shower around. There was a twenty-feet gap in the guard rails.

Red emergency lights began to wink imperatively in alarm boxes placed at regular intervals along both walls. A police-car vomited from a branch tunnel, snored along the steel floor and reached the damaged truck.

Parking his car on the track now blocked by the truck, Lloyd got out and hurried back. A steady stream of vehicles sped by him on the other tracks, their drivers bestowing no more than casual glances. Several ran over the point at which death had recently made a hideous, one-gulp meal. They passed on, blissfully unaware of danger.

"I'm sober, cold sober I tell you," the truck driver was shouting. "Who wouldn't be at this time in the morning?" He glared challengingly at the police officers and disregarded the fact that nobody had accused him of being drunk. "But I saw a fellow right in the middle of the fast track. Then he lit up and just wasn't!" For no obvious reason, his attention switched to Lloyd. "There was a chump on the track. I saw him myself. And he went *phut* right in front of my eyes."

"That's right," soothed Lloyd. "I saw the same thing."

The truck driver glowered as if about to call him a liar. Then he firmed his lips and breathed heavily.

Lloyd said to the police officers. "What he says is quite true. A man disappeared." He dug a card from his wallet and handed it over. "Two similar cases occurred yesterday. I saw both and reported them to Captain Henderson."

"Well, we're just inside the city limits," remarked one of the officers, "so you can say your piece to Henderson again." Favoring Lloyd with a peculiar look, he turned to the other officer. "Stay put, Joe, while I go call the crane."

Getting into the police-car, he tooled it onto the fast track and raced toward the Liverpool exit. The car shrank along the Tunnel's bore and whizzed around a bend.

"I saw what I saw and I'm cold sober," asserted the truck driver.

"Shut up!" ordered Joe. Pushing back his peaked cap, he gave Lloyd the hard, cold look. His manner suggested that he viewed doctors as a bunch of whisky-soaks. He'd smelled their breaths often enough. "Spooks in the Tunnel," he said. "Pfah!"

The truck driver shot an annoyed glance at Lloyd, saw that he had no

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intention of answering back, so took it upon himself. "I tell you we both saw a fellow vanish right in the middle of the fast track."

"I know, I know," said Joe. "The story's worth sticking to."

"It's true whether you goddam well believe it or not," swore the trucker, in rising tones. He waited until a string of cars had passed and began to walk across the track. "It was somewhere about here."

"Keep away from there," warned Lloyd, not liking the situation.

The police officer grinned at Lloyd, followed the trucker and gazed with mock-interest at the floor plates. "I don't see anything."

"It was somewhere about here," repeated the trucker. Waving one hand, he indicated a vague area along the floor's center. For a moment he stood warily still while more cars shot past him, then he walked slowly along the white-painted center line, his attention in front of his feet.

"I'm not superstitious." The police officer threw Lloyd another craggy grin and took one defiant stride along the center line in the direction opposite to that taken by the truck driver.

Some strange instinct, some weird foreknowledge of his imminent end wiped the grin from his heavy features. His left foot hesitated a fraction even as he was taking the second step. His eyes were pools of agony in that tiny moment of life still left to him.

Then vivid, scintillating death bloomed around and sucked him down. Before his mind had time fully to realize that he was poised on the very brink of oblivion, he had gone for ever from the ken of men. A cannon-like crack was his only lamentation.

The truck driver stood like a dummy except that his mouth was a red, silently twisting ring in a chalk-white face. For several seconds he stood thus while traffic pounded past him on either side. Several drivers yelled at him to get the hell off the track.

Suddenly he emitted a long, whistling gasp and was galvanized into frantic activity. He made a mighty spring toward his disabled truck, reached the middle of the intervening fast track; a bulleting machine arrived at the same spot at precisely the same time.

Lloyd averted his horrified gaze, heard a brief, piercing yelp, a loud, squashy thump, a nerve-torturing scream of dragged rubber. The car braked into the side sixty yards farther along.

The motorist came racing back, his hands gesticulating as he ran, his voice uttering wild words that rose and fell in agitated cadences. His shocked eyes searched the Tunnel, dreading to find the mutilated thing for which they sought.

A dozen paces from Lloyd, he stopped. His voice died away on a

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querulous note. Already pale, his face went paler. There was no body to be seen.

A breakdown crane pulled out of the passing stream of vehicles, got into the blocked slow track and reversed up to the truck. Mechanics juggled around with chains. Lloyd watched them, saying nothing. Also silent, the motorist stood by him and wore the vague expression of one in a dream.

With a swoosh of displaced air, a police-car arrived and edged into the gap between the crane and Lloyd's parked machine. It stopped beside the guard rails. A city cruiser followed and parked behind it. It was a tight fit but the two drivers made it.

Henderson crawled out of the cruiser. He showed pained resignation at the sight of Lloyd.

"You again?"

Before Lloyd could reply, the first police officer got out of his car, stared around and demanded, "Where's Joe?"

"Gone," said Lloyd, succinctly. He showed himself baffled and worried. "He took the story with a pinch of salt. Despite my warning, he insisted on mooching around. He vanished. He went the same way as the others."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Henderson, aggressively, "that while you've been waiting here an officer has been murdered or kidnaped right under your nose?"

"That's the way it was," Lloyd insisted. He indicated the still stupefied motorist. "What's more, this fellow hit the trucker on the fast track and must have killed him outright. But there isn't a body around."

"Meaning what?"

"By sheer chance the body must have struck the fateful spot and got absorbed like all the rest."

"Didn't you see it?"

"I wasn't looking. I turned my face away as the bump came."

"Well, didn't he see it?" asked Henderson, eyeing the dopey motorist.

"He shot past before he could stop. It must have happened behind him, as he pulled in." Lloyd eyed Henderson reflectively and asked, "Do I look bronzed and fit?"

"Are you crazy?" Henderson retorted. "Bronzed and fit! What are you getting at?"

"Tell me whether I look pale or brown and I'll tell you why I ask," encouraged Lloyd.

"You're brown as a berry," growled Henderson, unwillingly. "You look the picture of health."

"So did the newsvendor, apart from the fact that he was dead," said Lloyd, drily. He glanced toward death's hiding place on the steel floor. A heavy truck ran over it even while he looked. So did a number of vehicles. "I thought I seemed a little sunburned when I saw myself in the mirror this

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morning."

"That's nice," said Henderson. "That's real nice. I'm glad you're feeling fine." Producing his pipe, Henderson knocked out the dottle on the heel of his shoe, hammering with hard, vicious strodes that symbolised his unspoken thoughts.

"Looking back," continued Lloyd, ignoring the other's antics, "I remember sensing a very brief but very sharp flood of warmth when the crimson flare appeared outside the subway. I had the same experience here. That red flash emits powerful rays some of which precipitate tannin."

"So what?" asked Henderson. He ceased maltreating his pipe and rammed it in his jaws. Grogan came up, distracted his attention for a moment. Henderson looked around and said, "But there's nowhere to go in this place." Grogan muttered again, in slightly more urgent tones, and Henderson rasped, "Of course, you *would*, wouldn't you? All right, beat it!" He scowled as he watched Grogan start up the cruiser and whirl away. Then he turned back to Lloyd. "What was that you were saying, Doc?"

"This phenomenon emits radiant heat during its fractional spurts of activity. It releases an ultra-short blast of energy whenever it swings into action." Lloyd hesitated, went on, "For what it's worth, my guess is that it's an alien form of life, a creature from another world."

"That'd look good on police files," offered Henderson, unimpressed. "Banshee masticates men."

"I've said nothing about ghosts or supernatural creatures. I'm thinking quite seriously of an extramundane entity, of life from some other planet, a thing that might be normal and natural enough elsewhere no matter how unique here. I conceive of something endowed with a power unfamiliar to this world, something certainly invisible to our eyes, something that may be intelligent."

"Invisible and intelligent," echoed Henderson. He began to show some uneasiness. Shoving his empty pipe into a pocket, he gazed around. "It could be watching us right now, huh? If you're correct, and if it can read thoughts, and if it knows that your guesses may lead us to it, your number's up!"

"Could be," admitted Lloyd, grimly. "If I pass out in a blaze of glory—" He let the sentence die out, paused, then added, "Might have helped if the Tunnel had been closed to traffic immediately the thing showed itself here."

"Easier said than done," Henderson declared. "We'd have to get permission from the Tunnel Committee and that might take a month."

"Never mind." Lloyd shrugged and went on, "I've a hunch it's too late anyway. The menace has

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moved or been carried elsewhere. I don't see what we can do except sit down and apply our brains to the problem. There ought to be a solution somewhere—but it needs finding."

"You've said a whole lot," approved Henderson. "And we'd better be quick about the finding. If this goes on and nothing effective is done about it, there'll be a major panic. The newspapers will take us to town in a bath-tub. I'll hate to be in my shoes once the shouting starts. We've got to do something." He looked hopefully at Lloyd, emphasising the 'we.'

Coming to life, the dazed motorist chipped in with, "I knocked a fellow up against the roof. And he never came down." He eyed the others beseechingly, almost as if he hoped that they would solve the mystery by producing the victim for his inspection.

"Yes, yes, we know," said Henderson. "If you'll follow us to Central Station we'll record your story." He glanced around, noted the still vacant space on the slow track, added heartily, "Someday I'll tear Grogan's head off." Then he went to the other police-car and clambered in.

They left the Tunnel one behind the other. First the police-car, with Henderson pondering the fact that it was tough to be faced with a few killings without a corpse. Next, Doctor Lloyd, driving automatically while his analytical mind struggled with the puzzle of how to identify a weird menace and destroy it. Lastly, the motorist, too baffled to be capable of clear thought.

And while their tires rolled out of the Tunnel's mouth, another tire trundled past the twelve-story building that is Liverpool's biggest department store. A hurrying shopper crossed this path made by rubber that had run from Birkenhead and right through the Tunnel.

The shopper entered the store, thrust through the bargain-hunting crowd and took an elevator to the fourth floor. To local humans this was the hardware department, but to something not human it was the cafeteria. Plenty on the menu and serve yourself *ad lib.*

IV

PUSHING A COUPLE of newspapers across his desk, Henderson said, "Read 'em and weep. I told you they'd take us over the jumps, didn't I? They'd have made it twenty times more lurid if they hadn't been scared of the readership getting out of town at a fast lick." He twisted his mouth sideways and adopted a high-pitched, whining voice. "The cops cost us a million a year. We ask yet again: what are we getting for our money?" Then he said, "Bah!" and kicked the waste-basket.

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"I've seen them." Without picking up the papers Lloyd noted the headline sprawling across the nearest: MYSTERY OF MISSING MEN. It was a very mild journalistic yelp considering the circumstances. "I dropped in to see how you were progressing."

"That's a laugh!" Henderson's snort fairly trumpeted his disgust. "If we reduced our pace we'd be going backward." Taking a slip of paper from a drawer, he scanned it. "Up to ten o'clock the score was forty. Only twenty-odd hours since the first victim and the score's gone up to forty. That's not murder. It's massacre." The telephone shrilled upon his desk, he snatched it up, answered it briefly, dumped it and snarled, "Forty-one."

"Of course, those may be only the known cases," suggested Lloyd. "There may be others not yet reported or for various reasons unreportable."

"You are a very great comfort to me," said Henderson.

"I'm not here to offer solace," Lloyd retorted. "Let's face the facts as they really are. We just don't know the total number of victims, do we?"

"No," agreed Henderson, unwillingly. "The score is no more than an approximation. We estimate that about a dozen people vanished during that store panic. We've had to base our guess on the garbled stories of terrified survivors. You know what happened: a couple of hundred were injured in the general rush to escape. Since then a dozen people have been reported by relatives or friends as missing. But some folk can vanish for quite a time before anyone realizes they have gone. It may be that twenty, thirty or even fifty got taken during that orgy."

"Where were the next tragedies?"

"One right outside the store, another at the end of Church Street, then two more at the other end, then five at various points along Paradise Street." He gestured toward the telephone. "That last one was in Cleveland Square."

"H'm! Maybe heading for Chinatown."

"Chinatown?" Henderson stared at him. "You think it has a destination in mind?"

"It might, but I doubt it." Lloyd eyed him speculatively. "With your permission, Captain, I'd like to lend a hand with this affair."

"You're welcome," said Henderson with indecent promptness. "I've known you long enough to accept your claim to sanity. And it's said that two minds are better than one."

"Then let's have a box of white-headed pins and a large-scale map of Merseyside."

Pressing a button on his desk, Henderson gave orders to an answering police officer. While they were waiting, Lloyd explained his

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purpose.

The materials arrived. Henderson swept his desk clear of papers and spread the map across its broad top. They began inserting pins, marking the heads with numbers in order of known incidents.

"Number two, a member of the Cheshire Constabulary in West Kirby." Peering at the map, Henderson put his finger on a point. "He was seen and heard checking a bank there." The finger shifted. "He should have phoned a report from there but didn't. He vanished somewhere between those two places."

"We'll put the pin at the midway mark," said Lloyd. "It can't be far out." He rammed in the pin and numbered its head. "Right outside West Kirby Station." His gaze followed a thin red line running from the station, along the coast and across the river to Liverpool. "The railroad is a link—if that means anything."

"Next was a drunk who left a wedding celebration here for his home, there. He never arrived."

"Midway again," said Lloyd, ramming in the pin.

"Next, a night watchman." The finger pointed to Moreton. "He couldn't have gone far from excavations in the main road just there. But he disappeared."

Another pin went into the map. More pins were inserted and numbered as Henderson carried on with his details. The positions of some markers were as indefinite as the evidence upon which they were based but others were quite definite.

V

AFTER THE FORTY-FIRST pin had stabbed its point into Cleveland Square, the two men studied the map attentively. Henderson's puzzled gaze moved from one marker to the next; Lloyd's expression was one of keen speculation.

"The path of a crazy coot," declared Henderson. "Out of Liverpool, around the tip of the Wirral Peninsular and back again."

"Past pool halls, dance palaces, concert rooms, theaters and cinemas, all crammed with suitable prey," Lloyd remarked. "A lot of wandering around just to get solitary individuals at various points." He stewed it over a while, added, "That seeming illogicality tell us a few things. Firstly, it shows a certain amount of caution and so may be vulnerable. Secondly, it doesn't move around of its own volition. Lastly, it's invisible because it's exceedingly small."

"How do you figure that out?" asked Henderson.

Lloyd gestured at the pins. "If it had independent pedestrian power it would have sought pastures a good deal more lush than those it did explore. There's no evidence of

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any calculated attempt to bite at crowds. On the contrary, it followed what looks like a random path—except that those pins can be made to link up with each other. The conclusion is that it was carried, dropped, picked up, carried again. Like a typhoid germ. Ever heard of typhoid carriers?"

"Sure have!" Henderson admitted.

"At this stage we can't do much more than guess. For what my guess is worth I reckon we have to deal with a thing that is parasitical and makes its prey transport it. My theory is that this is a submicroscopic menace that gets toted around from place to place and guzzles a larger life-form whenever it feels the urge. Probably it has some way of attaching itself to an unwitting carrier whenever it wants to go some place else."

"Well, you may be right." Henderson said, doubtfully. "Though I don't see why it has to be submicroscopic."

"I think it is because I've seen it in action, twice. Little as there was to see, it was something. The thing does not appear at visible size, grow bigger and then vanish. It seems to pop right out of nothingness. Then it balloons and collapses at terrific speed. Its normal proportions must be very, very small. Maybe forty devils like it could dance on the head of a pin."

"You're making things mighty easy for us," observed Henderson, gloomily. "All we need do is search the whole of Merseyside with a powerful microscope."

"It's tiny," Lloyd persisted. "It swallows prey far bigger than itself, expanding like a python ingesting a hog."

"And what happens to the prey?"

"The hog is dissolved in the python's digestive juices," Lloyd gave back. "Same here. The victims are absorbed, at infinitely greater speed. It's some weird, alien digestive process based on tremendous compression. I don't see any other way of accounting for what is taking place."

"I can go with you part of the way—but not that far." Henderson frowned in effort to think up a better explanation. "Nobody's going to convince me that a two-hundred pound man can be squeezed into the belly of a germ."

"When he's in the belly he isn't a man. He isn't even a fragment of stuff. He's a mere spark of original energy." Doctor Lloyd studied the other and asserted, "Relative to themselves, the distance between atoms is so great that if matter could be collapsed you'd not be able to see a prize bull." He extracted a pin from the map, pointed to the resulting hole. "You could drop it through there."

Henderson said nothing.

Carrying on, Lloyd said, "My theory is that the victims have their

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atoms packed and are thus converted into energy by some mighty force unknown on this world but quite common elsewhere. A natural development of binding power, perhaps. Some of that energy is violently radiated and ought to be detectable from a distance. With luck and the right instruments it might be possible to track it down by its electromagnetic belly-rumblings."

"So long as your wild ideas enable us to kick it in the guts—" began Henderson. The telephone interrupted. Jamming the receiver against his ear, he listened. He went slightly pop-eyed, hung up, made for the door. "It caught a bunch. About thirty gone. Come on, Doc!"

This was Pitt Street, once the heart of Chinatown but now on the edge of it. Ordinarily it swarmed with garbage-sniffing curs, yelling children, gossiping women, slouching men. Now it was empty of all save a group of blue-uniformed stalwarts who waited at the end nearest Cleveland Square.

Henderson heaved himself out of the police cruiser, Lloyd following. A sergeant came up and saluted.

"What happened?"

"There was a speaker up there." The sergeant pointed to a place on the sidewalk underneath a garish shop-sign. "He was a Chinese gabbling about something or other. He had a small audience of men, women and kids. About thirty in all, mostly kids. The whole lot went west in a hell-for-leather blaze of fire. There was just this great flash and a violent band and the entire bunch had gone."

"Did you keep everyone away from that spot? Did you make sure no fool went tramping all over it?"

"We did," said the sergeant, "and a fat lot of good it did us." Without waiting for his superior's inevitable question, he beckoned to a patrolman standing nearby. "Tell the Captain what you told me."

"I was in the Square when a big bang and a lot of shouting brought me running," the patrolman explained. "The speaker and his audience had just gone *phut*! and scared witnesses were bolting indoors. I felt heat coming from somewhere, looked for the source and found it. It was a cherry-red spot of fire glowing by the kerb." He hesitated, continued reluctantly, "It sort of enticed me toward it."

"*What*?" ejaculated Henderson.

"It attracted me," insisted the patrolman, showing the doggedness of one who little expects to be believed. "It was like a pinpoint of ruby flame and it scared hell out of me but drew me toward it, like a snake. I had to use all my willpower to back off. I made it somehow and beat it right down to here. It didn't seem to have any drag at this distance, though I could still see it. So I stayed put and kept watch on it until the sergeant ar-

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rived."

"And then?" Henderson prompted.

"We remained at a safe distance and sent a call to you. Three or four minutes before you arrived the sensation of heat suddenly ceased."

"Complete digestion," put in Doctor Lloyd.

The patrolman stared at him a moment, then looked slightly sick. He went on, "Soon afterward a seagull soared above the street and came directly over the glowing spot. The bird dived down, landed in a clumsy kind of way, almost as if it didn't quite know what it was doing. It strutted around the speck of fire then took to its wings and made off. From this point we couldn't see exactly what was happening. But after it had gone we found the fire had gone too."

"It went with the gull," said the sergeant, positively.

"And nobody knows where it is right now." Henderson looked ireful as he spoke to Lloyd. "I thought that prompt isolation might be a good idea and issued orders that everyone must be kept away from the next vanishing-point." He made a gesture of futility. "That simple precaution proves useless—even the birds are against us."

"There's an aspect still more serious," commented Lloyd. "For the first time this menace has become visible. This officer saw it. You know what that means?" He paused to let it sink in. "The thing is growing."

"Huh?"

"It's growing," repeated Lloyd. "That accounts for its increasing appetite. It's growing fast. I don't like it."

"*You* don't like it?" echoed Henderson, with a faint touch of sarcasm. "Who the heck does?"

"You misunderstand me," said Lloyd. "I don't like the idea of it growing up to a given point."

"What point?"

"Where it increases itself by budding or by fission or whatever other means of reproduction it employs."

"Reproduction?" Obviously this was something that had not occurred to Henderson. "You mean this hunk of hell is likely to have offspring?"

"I don't know. I'm only shooting in the dark." Lloyd's eyes searched the sky as if he hoped to find the marauding mote and kill it with his stare. "Growing, or reproducing, or whatever, its appetite increases with eating. Thirty at one bite may be a mere snack compared with what it'll accomplish in due time."

"God!" said Henderson.

"Things are desperate enough already," Lloyd went on, "and we just can't afford to wait for them to get worse. We'll have to concoct a plan of campaign." He got into the cruiser. "Let's return to headquarters and beat our brains

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around."

VI

ANOTHER FIFTY VICTIMS in the mid-afternoon, and two hundred in the evening, were events that no earthly power could hide from the attention of the Press.

The fifty comprised part of another audience listening to a strike-leader in Islington Square. Nobody noticed a lone bird floating above the soap-box, nobody saw it flare briefly and vanish. Neither did anyone see the fall of ruby death from the point where the bird had been.

The orator bawled, the audience listened, the menace hungered with a fierce, ravenous desire that was not of the world. Came a huge, uproarious flare of color, terrific in its all-embracing vim. Then an ear-busting crack followed by silence and ghastly vacancy.

Two hundred formed a line-up outside a movie-house, waiting to see an epic titled *A Date With Death.* They kept the date themselves. A mutt ran among them, was kicked, cursed and chivvied. Then came the holocaust.

That eye-searing blast was ferocious. Its outpouring flood of energy cracked the windows of neighboring shops and sent a column of hot air to the skies. A tremendous boom signalled that matter once forming two hundred human beings had been converted into basic energy, the prime stuff of the universe.

The Press let itself go, on both the local and the national scale. Radio and television tried to out-do the printed word. News, rumors, orders, advice and warnings were thrown at the public from every conceivable angle. Britain feared, Lancashire trembled, Merseyside quaked, Liverpool went into a prize panic.

Luxurious sedans and decrepit jalopies jostled each other in one mad rush through the Mersey Tunnel towards the safety of the south. For imaginary reasons or no reasons at all, thousands felt that the north or the east offered greater sanctuary and they crammed the roads in those directions.

There was a menaced myriad without vehicular means of quick escape. Some had bicycles, some stole them, some set out on foot. A big mob crammed the Pier Head, waiting fearfully and impatiently for overcrowded ferryboats. In Liverpool's northern suburb of Aintree, one group repaired to the Second Avenue Chapel, intent on prayer. They sought heaven and found hell. They met together and went together—into the gape of an extra-mundane maw.

Five placid cows grazing together in a field near Aintree Racecourse were the next to go. Their momentary pyre was an enormous

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gout that blazed upon the coaches of a passing train and tanned its frightened passengers even as they blenched. Police with shotguns, troops with recoilless rifles and large grenades, raced to the field and arrived too late—assuming that they could have done anything effective had they been on time.

One hour afterward a ravening inferno sprang from the adjacent suburb of Walton, painted the lowering sky with streaks of vaporous blood, then imploded with a great crash. The entire stock of a riding-school, forty horses in all, vanished as if they had never been.

Henderson was slouched over his desk, eyes red-rimmed with lack of sleep, when the great news came through. His phone shrilled, he took it up wearily, heard an excited gabble coming through the wires. Dashing outside, he found the cruiser, stuck his hand through the driver's door and sounded the siren.

"I'm here, Captain, right under your nose," came Grogan's plaintive voice from the driving-seat.

"So you are. Wonders will never cease." Henderson hustled round to the other side and scrambled in. "We'll pick up Lloyd. Get going—you can forget about speed limits."

They found Lloyd ready. He got into the car, glanced inquiringly at Henderson.

"It's right in the middle of Sefton Park," Henderson informed. "It grabbed a patrol of six near the boating lake. It then enticed a dog and might have got away if another patrol hadn't been quick to shoot the animal. They're trying to keep the thing isolated. Naturally they're remaining a safe distance from it themselves. It's trying to attract passing birds and they're shooting 'em down as fast as they come."

"We may have it cornered—provided they can keep shooting and shoot good," said Lloyd.

Slewing sideways, their fast machine swept around a sharp curve, flashed through the ornate entrance to Sefton Park. It shot by the lake and sped westward along the drive.

They could see the wary guardians as they neared. The men formed a ragged curve—a circle would have been dangerous considering the gunplay. There were a couple of hundred men in the line; police, troops, civilian volunteers, all armed.

A motorcycle cop came up and saluted Henderson. "It's over there, Captain, a hundred and fifty yards in front of the line. It's grown as big as a goose-egg."

Reaching the array of watchers, they could see an intense ruby glow in the grass ahead. It flamed at them in hungry silence. It was like an eye torn from the head of an alien god, still glaring with vestigial life, calling, promising, coaxing, threatening. All could sense its eerie come-hither urge, but distance weakened the hypnotic effect and

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enabled them to resist.

"Just shot a crow," informed a youth with a small-bore rifle cuddled in his arms. "It called the bird down so clearly you could almost hear it. We blew it into a mess of feathers as it landed."

"Here's the sheep," said Henderson, suddenly. With Lloyd at his heels he hastened toward a small truck that had jerked to a stop alongside the police cruiser.

A large sheep was hauled from the truck and chivvied up to the line of men. The animal bucked and bleated, struggling in the grasp of a couple of hefty cops. Another cop produced an iron-bound box from the truck and gave it to Lloyd.

Lloyd said to Henderson, "So you got it all right?"

"You bet. I wrote it down exactly as you said and put in a requisition for it. The military did some quibbling but they had to give way."

"Good!" Lloyd opened the box and had a look at the contents. "One fulminate of mercury capsule and seven kilograms of Novite. Ugh! I could go to the Moon on that." He nodded toward the line of armed men. "When we're ready those fellows had better be right back by the lake. This stuff goes off with the granpappy of all whams."

"It had better," was Henderson's comment. He gazed toward the lump of bottled lightning ambushed in the grass, then he scowled and looked away.

Bending over the restless and uneasy sheep, Lloyd buckled a roughly made canvas belt around its middle. To the belt he fastened the contents of the box. He handled the potent containers much as an art dealer would handle Ming vases.

"A suitable ray might knock off that red egg," he hazarded as he worked, "but what chance do we get to experiment with it? None at all!" He sneezed, held tightly to a container. "We can only use whatever is immediately available—and hope it works."

The sheep struggled. Lloyd gripped it more firmly with his knees while cops hung on to its head and tail. Lloyd fastened the last strap.

"That gob of hellfire has a grip that can squeeze atoms together and then pack their electrons, protons and other oddments, converting the lot into a mess of wavicles. It keeps what its weird metabolism requires and expels the rest as radiations." He gave Henderson an uncertain but hopeful grin. "It may be a top-notcher at high-pressure work—but it'll be positively brilliant if it can pack the atoms of unstable molecules."

"You really think so?"

"We'll see." Lloyd looked over toward the glowing target. "We're going to try solve the ancient problem of what happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object." He stepped away

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from the sheep. "An exterior explosion might merely blow it someplace else, but a violent disruption right inside its very guts—"

"A cat!" yelled an urgent voice far over on the left. "Quick! Get the damned thing!"

VII

THE FELINÊS LITHE FORM was slinking half-hidden throught the grass and directly toward the enticing peril. A fusillade came from that end of the line. The cat stood up on its hind legs, jounced around, flopped and lay still. Guns on the right opened up on a fluttering pigeon, brought it down.

Silence for a few seconds, then a few gasped and others swore. The red eye moved. It bobbed slightly upward and moved nearer, slowly and erratically. It had picked up something in the grass, a rat or a mouse. Guns spoke all along the line, tearing apart the sod at the base of the ruby. Bullets thudded into soft earth with short, faint whops; others struck underlying pebbles and ricocheted with shrill screams that died in the sky. The red eye stayed put, shining evilly.

"Can't understand how it gets itself picked up without burning its carrier," remarked Henderson, looking relieved.

"I don't think it's hot except when digesting and radiating," guessed Lloyd. "Remember, it has always finished radiating before being picked up." He gestured at the sheep. "Clear the field and let's release this animal."

Quickly the armed line retreated to the edge of the lake, leaving Lloyd, Henderson and the two patrolmen still holding the sheep. The animal bleated querulously, turned fascinated eyes toward the fiery ovoid that was its destination.

"Shoo! Git!" shouted the two officers, letting it go and urging it forward.

Without slightest hesitation, in fact with a sort of ghastly eagerness, the animal trotted towards its fate. Its whole attention was upon the alien belly that it yearned to fill.

The quartet turned and ran like hell, shooting a couple of glances over their shoulders to ensure that the sheep was still on course. Their pounding feet brought them to the line of men at the same moment as the sheep reached its monstrous caller. Of one accord, the onlookers threw themselves flat.

For a second the whole world seemed to stand still while the ill-fated quadruped waited to be engulfed. The load on its back was immediately above the flaming egg. Then the egg became a balloon and again an egg. The sheep and its load of death had gone.

Such was the extreme rapidity of motion that the spectators were unable to grasp the exact extent of

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shrinkage. The egg remained somewhere near egglike dimensions for less than the space of a single heartbeat. Then it changed again.

With brain-stunning speed it elongated towards the zenith, flaring upward to a thing of nightmarish enormity. There it flowered, a mighty crimson tulip fully five hundred feet in height. Like a product of an insane dream it blossomed from the reeling earth. Its surface had the flowing ruddiness of molten iron and its rays were a subtly tormenting breath expelled from the inferno of the unknown. Then it burst.

A terrific roar rumbled and thundered, echoed and re-echoed over ten miles of rooftops, across the wide, sullen river and into the mountains of Wales. Something in the heavens poured down a cascade of earth, sods, pebbles and rocks that rained all over the field.

Where the bleating bait had stood and quivered, where the eye from beyond had glared, was now a great, raw hole forty feet deep. Fumes struggled wispily from this crater.

"Jer-*u*-salem!" said Henderson.

"Would you believe it?" Lloyd permitted himself a show of excitement. "It held the explosion in check for perhaps one-hundredth of a second. What power, what mighty power!" He glanced around at the other dumbfounded witnesses some of whom were still clambering to their feet. "Let's spread out and get moving. This area must be thoroughly combed."

He joined the line himself. It was an apprehensive row of men but it steeled its courage and trudged around until it had covered every inch of an area representing the complete scope of the explosion. Nobody vanished in a swift upthrust of lambent flame, nobody fell into a hellish maw that gaped suddenly underfoot.

"It's finished," declared Lloyd with undisguised satisfaction. We'll never discover whence it came. But it's gone and that's all that matters. We're safe."

"Unless another turns up sometime," said Henderson, with official pessimism.

"Well, we'll have some idea of how to deal with it."

They returned to the police-car. The armed two hundred were dispersing hurriedly, each anxious to be the first to spread the good news around. Henderson shoved a hand into the car and sounded the siren. He did it several times. It became monotonous. He gave it up and went for a walk.

Later, Lloyd went in search of him and found him by the lake. On the sheet of water a solitary oarsman was rowing at easy pace toward the shore.

Henderson said to Lloyd, "Get back to the car. I want no witnesses around while I hold Grogan's fool

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head under until he's stone cold dead."

Lloyd pulled a face. "Who am I to come between a man and his ambition?" He returned to the car, settled himself comfortably and waited.

—ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

THE FORGES OF NAINLAND

(continued from page 57)

arrow in the fire and let fly his shaft.

What, then, was weird, what was indeed his fate, what role had he to play? By this latest omen it was to sail with her and her men across the All-Circling Sea, to find more than mere refuge: to find rule! He called into the darkness by the shore, "Bab and Roke and Corm, Wendólin, and thee Nain . . . ?"

Let them come aboard. He would not for anything abandon a one of them here. Let them come with him across the Sea and begin life new: and a curse to Thule and all its thrall-weirds.

"Bear and Son of the Bear," said one voice.

"Star-sender," said one voice.

"Star-disperser," said another.

"Star-finder," said a next one.

"Finder of Star-spears, Heater of Forges, Forger of Fire-born, Seer of the Sorrows of the Land and Freer of this Land from Sorrows . . ."

He said, "Aboard of this vessel." He watched as they came. The woman's face glowed. Then her eyes met his in the brief flare of the tinder and the swift glare of the tow. And he saw that she knew and he saw that her hopes were dead and he saw that her age was full upon her. The dawn now sailed up from the Sea and its pale lamp replaced the flash-flash-flash of star-spear and fire-arrows. He said, "Captain-chief."

"Master. Bear."

He said: "Past this harbor is a headland and past that is another and past that is a river-mouth. Thither we will go."

The chief sailingman nodded.

"There you may leave us, and return to your own country, or you or any of you who wish may remain with us and fare if they will with us."

The sailingman scanned the tide and the shore and turned a bit and gazed off as if laying out a voyage in his mind's eye. "In that direction, then, Bear, you will go?"—he moved his hand—"To that way whither the stars hurled down their spears?—and where, I must suppose, those fiery spears may still be found?"

Arn said, "Yes. It is there."

—AVRAM DAVIDSON

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Dennis Etchison tells us that he's had three stories published in the late Ted Carnell's New Writings in SF, *and another in a recent issue of* F & SF, *all of which were "both more conventional and more science-fiction-oriented" than this story about a man obsessed by the pressures of time and his attempts to become a—*

TIME KILLER

DENNIS ETCHISON

Illustrated by JOE STATON

17,499,001 3,573,490,343

AT 8:30 SHARP he was up. He had been dreaming of sheep leaping over a series of concrete hurdles; as they reached the last they went over on their heads into an ever-spreading pool of blood and slime. When the familiar dulcet chords of the Astro-Vox sidereal alarm summoned him, however, he found he was on his feet by the brick-reinforced bed, suddenly cold but eager in spite of it to punch in this one last day.

Mallory stood for a moment rubbing the cobwebs from his eyes, moving waxy hands in front of his still blind face, the gesture of a foetus suspended in time. Then he snapped to.

He padded into the kitchen.

In the middle of the chill linoleum chessboard he ruminated, feeling the blood pumping and his muscles tingling to life as the electric clock—a Seth Thomas Speed-Read—hummed high and white on the kitchen wall.

He opened his eyes and the first thing he saw was the Omega watch.

He grunted phlegm and reached for the Erikofone, dialed UI 3-1212.

"The tie-um is . . .eight-thirty. . and forty seconds."

Beep.

He replaced the phone, focusing on his wrist. *Eight-thirty forty-eight.* Not bad for a production line timepiece. And according to his calculations the energy cell would be

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good for another five days.

That should be about four-and-a-half more than he needed.

He flicked through his memory file to the latest image of his time cabinet, and his mind cleared and verified the suspicion: a full package of new CdS cell stored ready on the shelf.

Of course they would have to go, too.

He slithered the expansion band off his arm. He stood there holding it up for another four or five seconds, as if considering some obsolete religious trinket. Then he jerked his arm out and swung it in a short, fast arc.

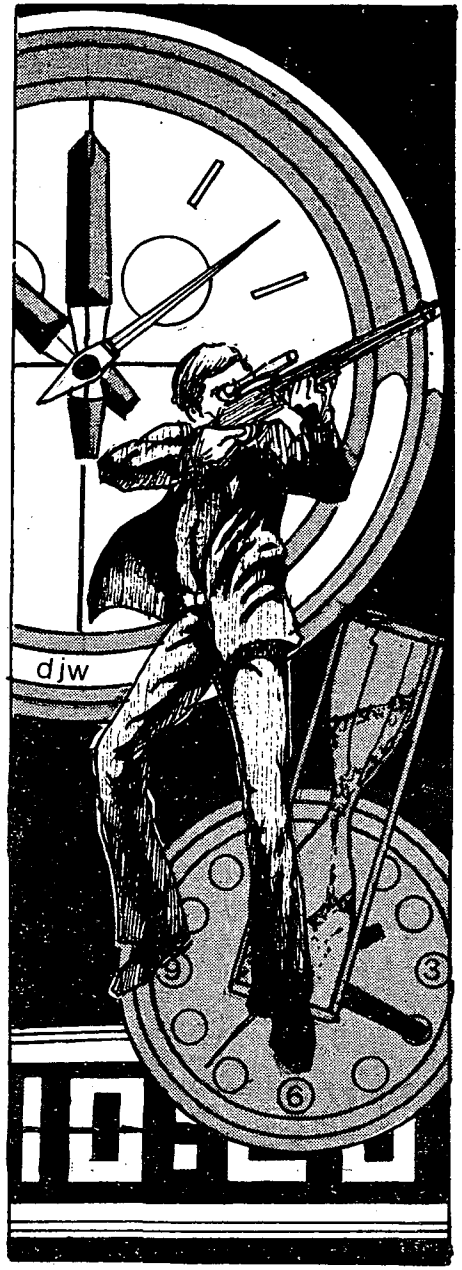
The watch smashed against the refrigerator, the crystal popping out startled like a dislodged monocle and rolling to a clittering stop by his toes.

Mallory blinked thickly.

He held a full breath, forcing life into his blood-stream, brushed off his hands and then went to work on breakfast.

He grabbed a minute steak out of the meat keeper and two eggs out of the refrigerator door. On his way to the stove, he paused for less than a second by the sink to drop the shattered watchworks into the open garbage disposal.

He lowered two breads into the silver toaster and twisted the gas on under the teflon frying pan. Using one hand, he cracked the first egg on the edge.



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Out plopped not one—but two glutenous yolks.

He pulled back, shivering.

Then quite suddenly he broke one of the yolks, wielding the spatula fiercely.

Disgusted, he threw the mess into the sink, got a sauce pan and hurriedly filled it with hot tap water. He got another egg from the refrigerator to replace the first, dropped the two eggs in the water and put the pan on the stove. He flipped the egg timer over as soon as the water began to fizz.

Marlene's ashes made a perfect medium for the timer. With the passage of time they had sifted and broken down into an even finer silt than they had been on the day he got them back from the crematorium. But he had kept a close scrutiny as the texture refined, opening the end of the small waisted container—so unlike Marlene—to supplement the contents from the supply in the doorstop urn as needed to keep it accurate. She had served him no good purpose in life, but he had been careful through nine years to see to it that she was good for something now. He thought it was only fitting.

FOURTEEN AND ONE-HALF minutes later he was through breakfast. He set the egg timer on its side and headed for the shower.

On the way he stopped at the gun cabinet.

His fingers skimmed lightly over the stocks, settling on the H & R Wildcat 317. He tapped it thoughtfully, then moved on to the big Savage 99. Something told him that he just might need the peculiar ease and speed of a lever action, though of course he could not yet say exactly why.

He gripped the heavy, steady-as-a-tree bolt-locked stock and tipped it back from the rack. He lifted it out and flipped the top tang safety with his thumb. He pushed the lever down, opening the gleaming receiver. He picked up the clip and chucked it into place and returned the lever. The gun was loaded and cocked. He hefted it and sighted down through the reticle in the new Redfield scope.

The weapon settled into his shoulder with something like the weight of years. He could fire it now. He zeroed in on himself in the circular mirror at the end of the hall. *He could fire it now.*

He dropped it to his chest and pumped the lever. A live 284 ejected out the side. *Of course.* He watched it roll through a slow quarter-circle on the thin rug. He stood looking down at it.

He was ready.

Thirteen minutes and some seconds later, he returned. He lifted the gun out again and fed it smoothly into the lined dummy package ready and waiting behind

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the cabinet. He closed the end and balanced the long, awkward parcel under one arm. He picked up the three small wrapped packages then, turned a thoughtful revolution to be certain that he was forgetting nothing. Only his car keys, next to the Sentinal Time-O-Light on the table. With some difficulty he slipped them into his coat pocket. He hesitated again, squinting. He seemed to be hearing something. Then he knew what it was. The clocks, all the clocks buzzing on and on as ever throughout the house. The sound, or rather the thought of the sound, distressed him. But there would be ample opportunity to finish them off, every last one, later—about 11:45, if all went according to schedule.

At the door he fumbled his time card out of its slot reflexly and punched in.

Ka-chunk.

9:00.

He withdrew the card from the clock slowly, with a new deliberateness. He saw this morning's check-in imprinted to the minute at the bottom. He saw it for the first time. Then he crumpled it up.

He stood still and cocked his head. There was something else. He started to retrace his steps, balancing the packages uneasily. Suddenly the corners of his mouth turned up.

For a moment he was gone; when he returned to the hall, his mind eased slightly, his lips were thin bloodless ribbons of ice.

Then he was on his way.

The front door drifted shut after him on its pneumatic cushion and the timed lock deep within it groaned almost inaudibly, resetting itself.

While back in the gleaming kitchen Marlene's egg timer, resting on its side as he had left it earlier and now snapped into two pieces at the center, poured its clinging sands down over the wet porcelain of the sink.

Mallory's footsteps ticked down the walk.

As the hand on the time clock sliced into the next minute.

9:01.

Ka-chunk.

17,488,956 3,573,491,593

THE TRAFFIC was lighter than he expected most of the way, though it clotted up predictably enough as he neared the Wilshire turn-off.

As he swung off the freeway at close to a snail's best speed, a Don Ellis record came on the FM to accompany him the rest of the way to Century City. This time Ellis used an old Bulgarian folk song as the basis for another of his extravagant contrapuntal excursions, in a cycle of 16 which alternated maddeningly between 33/16 and 36/16. And Mallory, swept along in an often futile

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attempt to follow the drivingly powerful drummer and fascinated as usual by the hyperbolic descriptions of the leader's quarter-tone trumpet, found that he was gritting his teeth by the time he managed to search out a parking spot on Fox Hills Drive. The relentless, scurrying notes, like a bunch of ants vomiting, had finally begun to get on his nerves.

He switched off the key, loaded his arms and clipped briskly if awkwardly around the corner and up Santa Monica Blvd., past Century Park West to the Avenue of the Stars. The sun was moving up rapidly to his left, a bright disk of white flame already high in the blanched blue smog-filled sky. The tall glass door would have been damned near impossible with his arms still full of packages; but even after he had stopped, opened two boxes and hidden their contents, six smaller boxes each, in their predetermined locations around the office buildings, the one remaining square parcel plus the long box sheathing the hunting rifle still rendered him no more dextrous than a blind man with a very blunt cane straining to prod his way into the austere front of the Tempus Eterna complex.

He rode the elevator six floors to the outer office of the Vice-President in Charge of Public Relations for the West Coast Branch, the only one who had agreed to see him.

The secretary, an artfully subdivided condominium stocked with freeze-dried efficiencies, greeted him with well-practiced hospitality.

"*Good* morning, sir. Do you have an appointment?"

"Mallory. The answer is yes. And the answer to your next question is ten o'clock."

"*Thank* you, Mr. Mallory. Won't you be seated?"

The secretary started a reflex swipe across the face of the intercom box with an iridescent, claw-like index fingernail. Then she caught herself.

"Oh, *I'm* sorry. Mr. Moorpark is due in anytime now. I hope you won't mind waiting. *Do* help yourself to the magazines, won't you?"

She did not wait for him to reply. Her green eyes fixed on the IBM typewriter on her desk. It whirred and clicked even before she touched it, and Mallory wondered if it was attempting to pick up the thread of a conversation he had interrupted by his entrance.

He paced to the window. Below, fountain water belled out in soundless sky-blues plashes. He watched a few seconds, then turned back to the reception room.

"Do you ever dream?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, do you ever dream?"

Pause. Again he had the feeling

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of intruding.

She looked at him strangely over her IBM typewriter, something like the way a beauty contestant who has just been propositioned by a centenarian judge might look.

"I do," he went ahead.

She suspended an inclination to blink.

Of course.

"Last night I woke up laughing," he said. "And I knew the world was mine."

He was painfully aware of the insular silence of the room.

A Tempus Eterna Time Calendar pulsed on the wall over the door.

He recrossed the room, counting his steps.

He stood under the clock, closed his eyes and held a breath. When he opened his eyes, he saw that she was observing him—and observing is just the word—with visible discomfort from behind the safety of her desk. Somewhere beneath that waspish training school veneer, he knew, she must have been experiencing a vague, undirected panic, confronted as she was with a character who, unlike herself and unlike everyone else she had had occasion to come in contact with since grade school, threatened to refuse to act within the perimeters of any socially proscribed role she could think of. In short, if she had been something other than a corporate secretary—a short-order waitress, for example—she might simply have said, 'What are you, some kind of nut?'

As it was, she rose stiffly from her plastic contour chair; he could almost hear the wheels turning behind her forehead as she said, "*Why* don't you just, um, go right ahead and take a seat, Mr. Mallory. I'm sure—"

"I wish I were."

"I beg your pardon?"

He waited.

"What actually was it that you wanted to see Mr. Moorpark about?"

Mallory gazed absently up into the clock. His arm flexed autonomically at his side, by his pocket, a simple movement to free his wrist from the irritation of his coat sleeve; simultaneously he said, "A time bomb."

She misinterpreted both events.

She swept out from behind her desk, her cheap jade eyes covering the wall clock protectively with the expression of a student teacher about to face her first disaster drill.

Then, remembering her training, she tried showing him her straight, bleached teeth.

"You know, Mr. Mallory, you know you could startle a person with a statement like that."

"Get back to your desk!" shouted Mallory.

She straightened, her chiselled breasts levelling aim at him.

"Perhaps you'd care for a glass of water." She edged tautly to the

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door. "Yes, that's it. I'll go get—"

"There is a water cooler in the corner. Now will you please," he suggested, "get the hell back to your own area and stay there?"

She quavered tenuous fingers up to brush a strand of hair from her forehead, but found it stuck fast to her moist skin.

"You know, sir, you have no right—"

He paced to the window, back to the clock.

"But I do. Don't you see?" he implored. "Everyone does, if only they had the guts. The whole oversized goddam population, that's the real time bomb. Get it? You're no different. You're speeding things up. Unnecessarily.

He thought he saw her fingers toy with the doorknob.

"The time it takes me to cross this office." He backed over to where he had left the long parcel. "The room is small enough as it is. Too small. I walk back and forth and I feel the walls, this low ceiling pressing in on me. I start to walk faster. But you move out on the floor, the already too small floor, and what happens?"

"I—if you don't mind I think I'll just buzz Mrs. Halloran. I'm afraid she's the one who should be hearing all this."

She tiptoed to the desk.

"I'll tell you what happens: *Don't touch that phone.* If you move out onto the floor with me, that cuts the time it takes me to cross this room in half. Two bodies, half the space, half the time. You understand what that means, do you?"

The secretary sprang on the office door with a grating swish of nylons, her fingers fumbling white on the suddenly slippery doorknob.

"It means we're speeded up, you and I. All of a sudden time has become double-time for us. As if it weren't going fast enough already."

He reached into the carton, cocking the rifle as he drew it out. He braced the stock on his thigh.

She spun around. Her eyes were like those of a cat on its way six flights straight down to the pavement. His first cut her deep in the abdomen. She careened back to her desk, insanely reaching for her purse. He cocked again. The second shot brought her to her knees behind the desk. An instant later she flopped back, her legs raised and spread apart so that when he went over he could see the blood spots dark red like crushed berries beginning to seep through her panty girdle and over the shiny mesh of her stockings.

He dragged her body out of the office, across the deserted corridor and into the room marked LADIES—EMP. ONLY. He propped her on the seat in one of the steel cubicles.

He heard a door open and the clicking of curious heels in the hallway. Presently the footsteps

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returned to their cage and the door closed behind them.

He had been back only a minute when Moorpark twisted the doorknob to the outer office.

"Good morning . . .? Should have known we'd be keeping someone waiting. Have you been waiting long?"

"You could say that."

"You must be Mr. . . . Now where is that efficient secretary this morning?"

He checked the agenda on her desk.

"Yes yes, Mr. Mallory, ten o'clock, is that right? Where is that girl? With the salary she's drawing, you'd think. . . . You haven't seen Miss Sprott, I take it?"

"She's probably still in the ladies' room."

Moorpark turned florid and laughed heartrily.

"Come on," he offered with a touch of the calculated good will of a professional conventioneer, "the talking's better in here."

He sauntered into his office, but Mallory did not follow. Through the open door Mallory saw that it was well-modeled and in an odd way luxurious, richly furnished in dark wood and leather, yet managing to present at the same time something of the spare and functional image of a Buchmanite minister's fulfilled dream.

Moorpark offered him coffee, which he refused.

"It speeds me up."

"Some truth in that," the executive admitted amiably, wandering back into the outer office. "But speed is all things to all people, isn't it." It was a statement. "Naturally in our world, the world of business, minutes mean money. It's as simple as that, I'm afraid. What we are and how well we succeed depends on the use we make of time. Sure you won't change your mind?"

Mallory shook his head.

The executive poured a steaming cup of heavy black liquid and rested a thin-trousered buttock on the edge of the desk.

"The longer we're with Eterna the more (shall we say vigorously?) it's brought home to us: the successful people of the world, that is to say the happy people, are those who don't waste time, their own or others'. . .who are never late to meetings, who wisely assign portions of time to their activities in relation to their importance." The executive made an industrial intrigue out of stealing another mouthful of coffee. "Which brings us right back to this appointment, doesn't it." This, too, he said as a statement, then chuckled wistfully in an exhibition of premature middle age undoubtedly intended to be endearing. "Let's get down to brass tacks. . . and trust we don't find some sucker sitting on them!" Chuckle, fading. "Let's get down to what's on *your* mind, Mr. Mallory.

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That is, beside the obvious fact that we're. . ." He wagged his scrubbed face at the chronometer on the panelled wall. ". . . Some nine-and-a-half minutes late already.

"There's more than your own time at stake. You have to see that." Mallory cracked his large knuckles noisily in the soundproofed room and did not glance around. Then he stepped over to the couch and lifted the rifle. To his surprise, he saw that the had not brought the Savage, after all; instead it was the golden 100-year Centennial Winchester '66, fitted with a Bausch & Lomb telescopic sight. That surprised him, until he thought about it. It had been a great old buffalo gun. "You're late for work, you're taking that much time away from those who are waiting on you."

"Oh my." The executive noticed the gun now. "But we really ought to have apologized straight off." He set down the cup and saucer and firmed the heavy eyeglasses on the bridge of his thin nose. "We Are At Your Service!"

"No offense intended," said Mallory emotionlessly.

"And none taken, rest assured. But you know, you're right, really quite remarkably right." His finger made a stab, trying to find a point in the air to hold onto. With his other hand he patted his brow with a neatly folded, monogrammed white handkerchief, which remained neatly folded, as he wilted into the secretary's chair. His soft-featured face reflected the appearance in his mind of something sudden and unexpected, perhaps an image of himself tapping in a wheelchair or of the half-eaten bar of soap in the bathroom, say. "Dear God," he said. "You're the one who blew up Elgin and Longines, aren't you."

"I want you on your feet."

"And Bulova, and . . . Westclox, wasn't it?" The executive managed to fit a Dunhill cigaret between his lips. "Smoke?"

"Go ahead, you're entitled. That's it. You're doing fine. I should have known not to expect more than a grunt from a pig."

The executive closed his silver cigaret case and tried to size up his visitor through the pale, wavering flame. "Not sure we catch the drift."

"Two minutes off your life."

"You mean this?" The executive pulled the long cigaret out of his lips, where it had stuck. "Ah yes. Well, everything has its price, doesn't it."

"Sometimes it's not worth paying. On your feet."

"Two minutes, you say. . . ."

Mallory braced the stock on his thigh and cocked the rifle. "You get 35 million to start with. That's all."

The executive clambered to his feet. He was beginning to perspire, in a thin, shining film that glazed

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his face and darkened the pallid hairs on the backs of his soft hands.

"Move!"

The executive walked as far as he could, stopped at the far wall and turned. "What is it exactly that you. . .?"

Mallory touched the trigger. "Faster."

The executive glided back to the desk.

"I said faster!"

He recrossed the office.

"That's right. Speed up. Until you feel it. I want you to feel it."

"But what is it you want us. . .?"

"Just keep moving. *Faster*."

The executive was rushing back and forth across the deep-pile carpet, his legs twitching and jerking. Mallory withdrew to the inner office. He noted Moorpark all but racing over and over the same route in the other office so fast that he almost ran into himself each way, moving from a place which was no longer there, through a place which could not be measured because of the movement, to a place which, it seemed to Mallory, did not yet exist for him. Every few seconds the executive glanced in at Mallory, who tightened his finger on the trigger of the Winchester. The executive moved faster. Despite the soundproofing, despite the carpeting and the tinted non-glare glass, through the slightly opened office window came the sound of an automobile skidding, hundreds of feet below in the street.

Through the doorway, Mallory watched the executive moving faster and faster. Now the figure's left arm stiffened and stood out from his body in a strange fashion, the fingers flexing and straining in the manner of a tortured insect.

"For the love of God!" he choked. "I'm having a. . ."

Mallory noticed with increasing detachment that as he moved he cast no shadow. The diffuse neon lighting rendered the image flat and dimensionless, unreal, and Mallory realized that the executive had served his purpose; any conversation beyond this point would be useless, approaching absolute zero in value.

Mallory raised the Winchester.

The figure in the other room stumbled. He clutched his left arm and rubbed his shoulder and began to cough.

Mallory lowered the gun.

The executive staggered, pressing his chest with his hands. He was having a heart attack, Mallory realized with cold clarity. He watched him as he started to die.

He collapsed like a puppet with its strings cut as one by painful one the links in the chains that bound him to this office and this world snapped. First the eyes squeezed shut and the sanguine face fisted horribly, then the left arm dipped until it brushed the carpet and

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seemed to pull the rest of the body down. As he completed the fall the trouser cuffs flapped away from the ankles revealing an obscene flash of fishbelly-white leg. Then he lay there moving in slow spasms. Mallory thought of the heart rupturing as it continued to pump and the blood running out, the way such things run out and cannot be stopped until it is all gone, mercifully, leaving nothing.

Mallory pivoted and stalked to the window.

17,448,896 *3,573,493,393*

Down on the street a few people drifted in and out of the office fronts.

The crowd would begin to thicken until at noon the concrete below would be filled with hundreds of milling bodies. In an instant he grasped for the first time with full consciousness what had brought him here in just this way today.

17,448,895 *3,573,493,423*

Feeling the seconds ticking off. Seeing the crowd grow with each tick. Scanning the quad, checking off the waiting bombs, so carefully placed, fashioned as before from the grenades he had managed to bring back with him into the country.

17,448,894 *3,573,493,453*

He waited. He waited while one part of his mind estimated how long it would take him to get down in the elevator, while another part of his mind estimated the speed of foot travel across the target area to the car, and still he waited.

17,448,893 *3,573,493,483*

17,448,821 *3,573,495,642*

Noon. People filled the pavement like rats released from cages onto a great stress rig. He felt them close around him as he had felt them on the freeway, as he had felt them over there and everywhere since. He thought he had a quick flash then of all the little people with their funny baggy clothes, so many of them, the way he remembered them with their wooden bowls hastily filled with ice cream only moments before it happened, squeezed together there under the rubber trees. But he let it pass again. This was too great an opportunity, here now with hundreds out in the open near the foundation sites. This time he would not wait for the timers to go off. Mildly surprised, he let his large hands caress the gun. *Efficiency was never one of my virtues*, he thought. But this time he would outdo himself. A nation can use larger bombs but a single man must work on his own level. He was grateful that he had seen over there how the growing pyramid could be stopped, could reverse and begin to disintegrate—a chance for progress to start again, as always throughout history. And he was about to do a little reversing of his own, even if it would only last a few hours. One part of him was

(continued on page 120)

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We receive several hundred stories in submission to this magazine every month, but it's a refreshing change to open an envelope and find, instead of a story, a 3,500-word explanation of why a story was not enclosed. . .

DEAR TED

RICH BROWN

Feb. 4, 1983

DEAR TED;

I can only assume from the tone of your letter that it was written after my announcement in the Science Fiction Writers Group bulletin that I had decided to retire and would never write another science fiction story. The friendship we've shared over these past 20-plus-years (not without occasional brickbats) gives you the right to ask what no other science fiction editor can—that I abandon this seemingly senseless retirement to write, at the very least, one more story for you.

I know, as you say in this letter, that my name on the cover would boost the sales of FANTASTIC by at least 10,000 copies. I know FANTASTIC needs that boost. Above all, I know I owe it to you. Because you're my friend. Because you were best man at my wedding, published my first story, defended me too many times to count in the fan press, in the SFWG and its predecessor the SFWA. Because of all the times you've helped when I really needed it. Even because, in asking for my help, you did not allude to any of these things and easily could have.

But I just can't do it. (I know you well, Ted; as your eyes hit this paragraph, the old paranoia flares up, and you say to yourself, "He means he *won't* do it." No, Ted. Can't. Absolutely *can not*. A matter completely beyond my control.)

I've had a dozen letters from editors since my announcement went out. Most of them saying "Don't do it, Rich—don't give up the field" and some of them, like your letter here, just asking me for one more contribution. Doubleday, Ace & Co. even offered to double my advance—to $40,000 a book—if I'd just continue the Lord Lynn Jommar series. I have answered them

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all negatively. So it's not money, and you're not alone, Ted.

I haven't explained myself to anyone—just kept to the tone of the announcement, that I've decided not to write anymore. I don't think I need explain myself to anyone except, possibly, you, because you're the only person with any right to expect an extra effort from me. If this "retirement" were just what it seemed to be, and not what it actually is, you'd have a story from me to plug that hole in FANTASTIC to read this morning instead of this rambling ill-constructed letter.

Let me emphasize one thing: As fantastic as the things I'm about to tell you are, they are absolutely true. And as true as they are, I know that if anyone tried to tell them to me, before they happened to me, I would not have believed them. So if it's easier for you to think that I've just deluded myself into *believing* they're true, feel free to do so, because I'd rather have you think I'm crazy than that I had betrayed you.

I have to start at the beginning. It was June or July or August—one of the summer months, I forget which— of '74. I was still just a fan then, half-heartedly working (when I had time) on an sf novel and a couple of sf stories that I thought had merit, but mostly involved with putting out a fanzine. I "kept my hand in" writing would-be sf more to attend writers group meetings than anything else. Based on the writers group which you founded—and which, if memory serves, launched you, and Terry Carr, Lee Hoffman, Alex Panshin, Calvin Demmon and Dave Van Arnam on their/your writing careers—the idea was still that mutual criticism might launch any or all of us into just such a career. "Us" being myself, Arnie Katz, Stive Stiles and of course, Warren Brick.

Anyway, on That Fateful Morning (whichever one it was), there was a large manilla envelope in my mailbox. At first I thought it was just a thick fanzine. But it turned out to be a manuscript instead, 50 double-spaced pages of a thing called, fer CRYsake, "Priestess of Vishnu." A little puzzled, I looked at the return address. I swear to God, it was from *Astonishing Stories*. A pre-World War II mag which had folded before I was born. And as plain as day on that manuscript, it said "By Rich Brown."

Do you know how the average science-fantasy hero, confronted with the impossible, always gives himself the little "I'm-crazy-or-I'm-not" speech? Either I'm crazy, he says, or I'm not. If so, they'll be along to lock me up soon; if not, then this is actually happening just the way it seems to be and I'd better react to it as if it were real.

I didn't give myself the speech. Because impossible things *just*

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don't happen. Except in science fiction stories. But I don't live in a science fiction story, I live in the real world, and impossible things don't happen in the real world.

So I just stood there with the sun coming down and the manuscript in my hand. Completely stunned. As near as I can recall, I thought, and said, nearly a dozen times, "Now what the hell is this?" I laughed a couple of times and nearly cried once.

But then I seemed to be able to piece it all together, to find a logical explanation: Warren Brick. Our practical joker. (Remember how, at Phillycon, you and I and Warren and half a dozen other fans and pros got on the subway at about midnight, and as we got on Warren said in a loud, clear voice, so the other passengers could hear, "Hey, what do you think these people are going to do now that a bunch of queers have gotten on the train with them?") That funny son-of-a-bitch. He was pulling a practical joke on me. Very elaborate, too: Complete with a "rejection" slip from *Astonishing.*

I like practical jokes. Even if they're pulled on me. And to show Warren that there were no hard feelings, I decided, I'd "read" the thing at the next writers meeting, then he could tell everybody that he'd actually written it and explain the joke. We'd all have a good laugh.

At the writers meeting, Warren—as much as everyone else—was unsparing in his praise for "Priestess of Vishnu." You know Warren's three expressions: Smiling, deadpan and serious. Warren was serious. More important, as I started to read the story to those assembled, I realized—as talented as Warren was and is—that he couldn't have written it. It was too good. Despite that gawd-awful title. A little pulpy, it was a fantasy-love story, tastefully done in the mode of *Green Mansions.* The writing was smooth, as poetic as good Zelazny, the characters were vivid and very believable and the story-line was strong if a bit off-trail. The opinion of the group was unanimous: If I couldn't sell that story ("but give it a new title, Rich"), there was something wrong with science fiction.

I had no intention of submitting it, of course, because despite what it said on the manuscript, I had not written it. But since I couldn't explain it logically to any of the members of the group, I didn't try. I just said I thought it still needed a little work, and I went home that night a little crazy, a little angry, a little confused.

Two days later another manilla envelope showed up with another story "by Rich Brown"—but with two important differences. This one was bounced by *Astounding Stories* but had a personal note of rejection by John W. Cambell (that's right,

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no 'p') in which he acknowledged that it was a "beautiful story" but because it "contained a number of errors of science fact" it was not *Astounding*'s kind of story. The other difference was that it was a shorter story and had been sent by first class mail, rather than "book rate"—in other words, it had a postmark. Ted, the postmark was July 12, 1940!

So *then* I gave myself the science-fantasy hero's speech: Either I have flipped out, or this is happening, etc., &c. But still I did nothing.

Well, actually, I did do one thing: I checked with the Post Office to see if there was any way to fake that postmark. A postal clerk assured me that there was no way it could be done, and when I showed him the postmark on the manilla envelope and told him I'd just received delivery he made a crack about how poor mail delivery service is in New York. Har-Dee-Har-Har.

A week passed before I received another short story. Then nearly a month went by before, plop, a novelette arrived. A few days later, another short story.

A number of factors influenced my decision to start sending the stories out. The most altruistic, I guess, was that they *were* damned good stories, stories which deserved to be printed and read. To paraphrase Burbee, they Had Something To Say—and they said it well. If I just sat on them, sf would be deprived of some of the best stories ever written in the genre.

The least altruistic reason was a number of realizations I made about myself. You see, I always wanted to be an Author. I wrote a story, in first or second grade, about a boy in the first or second grade who wrote a story about a boy in the first or second grade who went on to become an author—that was the whole plot of the story. I was John the Baptist, prophesying my own forthcoming. I wrote from that time onward with the idea that, eventually, I would be an author.

The trouble is, Ted, I never wrote because I wanted to create; I wrote because I wanted to be an author. More particularly, as I grew up, a science fiction author. In other words, my drive was not the drive of an Artist but of an egoist. I wanted the acclaim of my fellow men for having created, but I did not want to create.

It seemed as if my most devoutly hoped-for wish, in some manner too difficult for my comprehension, had been granted. Do you look a gift horse in the mouth?

"Priestess" became "Titan's Promise"—that's right, the first thing I ever sold you. When I got that first check I was as elated as if I had written it myself. In the week that followed, during my spare time, I didn't have time to read the manuscripts that came in, either of them, because I was retyping a

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novellette to send to Ed Ferman. He bounced it, but you took it. I *did* sell my third story to Ed, however.

I was mightily frightened on two accounts. The first was that I couldn't quite discard the "prankster" theory. If not Warren, then someone else. Since it was obvious that anyone with this writing talent would not be sending their stories to me under my by-line, but instead would be submitting them for professional publication, it occurred to me that, whoever this jokester was, he might be recopying old sf stories by someone I'd never read. If true, someone would surely notice—and I'd be branded as a plagiarist. The second fear was that someone would surely notice what I thought was an obvious discrepancy—the fact that, as a fan, while I'd written a few enjoyable articles and an occasional parody that won me praise, I had never written anything anywhere near as good.

But as you well know, Ted, no one ever accused me of being a plagiarist. The theory has long since been scratched. I was puzzled, at first, as to why my second fear never actualized itself. The answer, I've decided, is that I never wrote sf for the fanzines, and while I surprised a few people by being "good" at it, it was not enough of a surprise to arouse any suspicion. It's certainly easier to believe that I "found my medium" in sf than it is to believe in some utterly impossible space-time warp, perhaps to some alternate universe, which delivers up magnificent manuscripts to my door.

Once I started selling regularly, I quit my job. Inside of six months I sold a story to every magazine I'd ever hoped to sell a story to, including a number of slick sales to mags like *Playboy* and *Knight*. Ed kept after me to plug holes in *F & SF*, you filled an entire issue of AMAZING with my stories (under several psuedonyms) and had enough left over to print in FANTASTIC and STELLAR, Terry Carr was after me to do stories for *Universe*. Doubleday wanted me to do an anthology.

I was invited to join the Science Fiction Writers of America and the committee of the next World SF Convention was after me to take part in a panel discussion. When I went to fan-club meetings, I was no longer Rich Brown, the fan who put out a fairly good fanzine, but Rich Brown, the fan-turned-pro who was doing some awfully exciting stuff. Femmefans offered to sit in my lap. Among other things.

It was the sort of notice, acceptance, dreamed-about self-image that I had always wanted. It was an egotrip come true.

The mss. came in steadily. I'd say about 25 per cent just had to be retyped. The rest required editing: Sometimes very minor, occa-

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sionally major, and infrequently a complete restructuring. Some of the latter never sold: Even before the coming of the great manna-scripts from the sky, I'd been a fairly good editor, but a ghost writer I'm not. Still, for the sake of my own ego, I have to maintain that a small fraction of the creativity that has appeared under my by-line in the past ten years has actually been mine.

For a while I wondered if perhaps all professional writers had a pipeline of stories coming in from the past. I think I preferred to think that it was so; it helped me cover over the few regrets I had about doing what I was doing. But later, at an SFWA gathering, I saw Harlan Ellison remove himself to the back of the room to knock off a 20-page original story because Tom Purdom, of Paperback Library, was bugging him about finishing up one more for an anthology that was overdue. The story won Harlan a Hugo and a nomination for a Nebula.

I guess that revelation pretty well explains my one-sided feud with Harlan, doesn't it? As hard as it is for me to admit, even now, the fact is pretty obvious to me that all the enmity and disdain I've poured into professional and fannish print against him is because he actually was the creative person I had to pretend to be. Poor Harlan! Behind those half-hearted replies he's made, I'm sure there's a hurt soul: In his heart of hearts, he knows we should be brothers, not enemies. But I can't claim that brotherhood: It belongs to another me, an alter-ego, a self from some other dimensionality. His dimensions are too big for the real me, and realizing that, I hate myself. Hating myself only makes me hate Harlan more.

I really do have to apologize to Harlan. Soon, too. But I'm digressing, I see.

In those ten years, I only had one real scare: For three months my mailbox was empty. That was in '76-77. There were no manuscripts coming in for editing or retyping and Doubleday was after me for two more original stories for the anthology I'd contracted to do for them. Worse, I had no immediate money coming in and my rent was overdue. Colleen and the kid and I were just barely hanging on with the money she was making; I'd splurged my last big check to attend a regional sf convention (at which, as I recall, I took the opportunity to knock Harlan's writing ability). But I kept my head about me and claimed that I was suffering from writer's block. I got back a comforting note of understanding.

The package that finally arrived contained not only a book-length work but enough short stories to fill a good-sized anthology. I met my commitments, and the book, *Death Shall Have No Dominion*, won me

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my first Nebula and Hugo, as well as mainstream critical acclaim.

I don't have to go on and on and on about all these kudos; you know the rest, and so does anyone who calls himself an sf fan. "My" stories, if anything, got better and better, and the awards and invitations to speak more prestigious.

Ah, I know you, Ted White, know just what you're thinking: With all this undeserved acclaim behind me, I have finally seen how hollow it all is. At last, I see the error of my ways, and I have decided not to continue this sham. However, just one story will help FANTASTIC over that hump; if I could just—

No, Ted. I can't. Not won't; can't.

I have not lived with these fantastic events for ten years without developing some theories. The main one is science-fictional, and for all I know is riddled with inaccuracies. But it does tie the ends together, which is necessary for my sanity. It goes like this:

Somewhere, in some alternate universe in which *Astounding's* late editor spelled his name without a 'p', a person named Rich Brown lives at the same address that I live at in this universe. (Ever wonder, with all my success, why I never moved from here? Now you know.) He also lives 30 years behind me; my rough estimate is that his 1940 is my 1970. By now, he's reached 1954. Unlike me, he *is* an artist, and a devoted one. For about ten years now, he's been writing magnificent science fiction which doesn't sell because he's too far ahead of his time, but he keeps on trying. My God, what devotion! He must hold himself together with a part-time job (although I hope, I fervently hope, that he's perhaps independently wealthy) because his output, besides being magnificent, is fantastic. Every week or few days he trudges off to the mailbox and drops in his latest manuscript.

Something happens to that manuscript. I don't know what or where, but something happens to it. Somehow, like an ameba, on the way back from whatever editor happens to be rejecting it, it splits in two—and one of the pair gets into our universe, gets delivered to me. (I can't imagine him continuing for so long if he never received a manuscript back in the mail; I therefore assume that he *must* get one returned.)

He just keeps on writing, striving to create something beautiful, not knowing how fantastically successful he is at what he's striving for because he's never had recognition. (Ok. An occasional "keep it up" on a rejection slip. That much recognition.) Pouring his heart and guts into everything he does, controlling it all with a talent that cannot be denied. Ten years of rejection are as nothing; the artist

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within him will never—I repeat that, emphasize it, *never*—give in to defeat. It is just not in the animal.

Those are the dynamics in play, as I've come to believe in them. Of course, I could be all wet, you understand: It all might just be an Act of God. Or the leprechauns. Or the Good Fairy. Or all or none of the above. I've just tried to invest some science-fiction-type logic to it all.

Something that I never expected, but should have, really, happened about four months ago. I received a letter-sized envelope from what I assumed to be a romance-type publication. Chortling to myself, I opened it, half expected an invitation to write a true confession.

It was from Romances Publications, however, the publishers of *Planet Stories*. They've accepted "Priestess of Vishnu" and have offered to publish "anything—and we mean *any*thing—you care to send to us, even if it's only half as good as this." Of course, you and I, Ted, know it'll be even better. That letter, the first of many similar letters that were to follow, also contained a check, dated 1954, for $85.

I hope that's Good Money on the Other Side. If it isn't, I know he'll be getting the kind of money his artistry and devotion deserve pretty soon. Remember, I've "lived" his success over here, and it has been a privilege. I somehow sense that he is a much better person than I am; I just know he won't abuse his position as I did.

But you can see why I can't—not "won't"—give you another Rich Brown story. At least not the kind you really want, the kind *he* writes.

As for myself, while I took it bitterly at first, I am now resigned to the inevitable. I've been offered an editorial position at Random House, handling their sf line. I still have royalties coming in from the books and stories that are already in print; and the editorial side of things is were my own *real* talents lie.

Frankly, Ted, I haven't even got a suggestion as to how you can fill that 3500-word hole in FANTASTIC. It disturbs me, to be sure, because you were counting on me to come through for you, but it doesn't disturb me a great deal. You're an excellent magazine editor, the best science fiction has. And that's not a left-handed compliment (even though you're the only magazine editor we have left), if you think about it—the fact that you've kept three mags going, when all those around you have floundered, is testiment to your ability and ingenuity.

I'm sure you'll think of something.

Best Wishes,

—RICH BROWN

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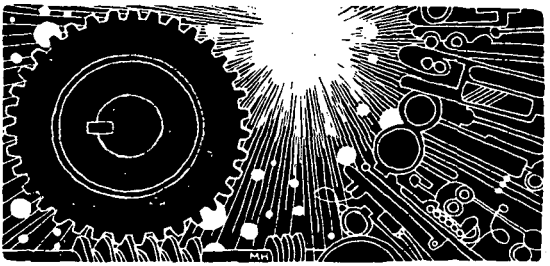
L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers



SIERRAN SHAMAN

Riding on Rosinante where the cars
With dismal unremitting clangors pass,
And people move like curbless energumens
Rowelled by friends of fury back and forth,
Behold! Quixote comes, in battered mail,
Armgaunt, with eyes of some keen haggard hawk
Far from his eyrie. Gazing right and left,
Over his face a lightning of disdain
Flashes, and limns the hollowness of cheeks
Bronzed by the suns of battle; and his hand
Tightens beneath its gauntlet on the lance
As if some foe had challenged him, or sight
Of unredressed wrong provoked his ire . . .[1]

—*Clark Ashton Smith*

CAN A POET find happiness in rural America? One poet tried but with only meager success. This was Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961), in his day acclaimed as one of America's foremost living poets. Smith also created a sizeable body of heroic fantasy of highly distinctive quality; hence no account of the genre is complete without him.

Yet Smith's life, outwardly uneventful, was full of contradictions and ironies. The most brilliant single member of the Lovecraft-*Weird Tales* circle of the 1930s, he suffered from poverty nearly all his life. This followed naturally from the type of work by which he supported himself; but he did not like it.

He said that he hated his home town but spent a virtual lifetime there. He deemed himself primarily a poet; yet he is mainly remembered for a body of weird short fantasies, most of them composed in one brief six-year period. His poems, once compared to those of Byron, Keats, and Swinburne, are known today to few outside of some science-fiction and fantasy fans. Few of those who nowadays make a stir in the poetic world have even heard of Clark Ashton Smith.

IN THE 1880s a footloose English bachelor, Timeus Smith wandered into north-central California, in the gold-mining country. Of respectable bourgeois family, he had spent his patrimony on travel but now settled down. In 1891, he married Mary Frances ("Fanny") Gaylord, the small, vivacious spinster daughter of a farm family of Long Valley, a few miles from Auburn. He was about 36; she, about four years older. Two years later their only child, Clark Ashton Smith, was born.

Timeus Smith was a lean man with a

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narrow, beak-nosed face and a small mustache. A quietly amiable but somewhat impractical person, his accent and British reserve did not make him locally popular. He moved in with his in-laws and worked as night clerk in a hotel. In 1902, he bought, under a mortgage, a tract of 44.15 acres on Indian Ridge (also called "Boulder Ridge") about a mile from Auburn. Here he dug a well and built his own house—not the "log cabin" it is sometimes called but a modest, one-story, four-room, wooden frame house sheathed in boards and shingles, with a tar-paper roof and no electricity or running water.

The tract was unpromising for farming, at which Timeus Smith made desultory efforts. A grove of California blue oak abutted the site of the house. The rest of the tract was cluttered with boulders and overgrown with scrub, green and lush in spring, brown and lifeless in the fall after the rainless California summer. Clark Ashton Smith described the landscape in one of his tales:

> The Ridge is a long and rambling moraine, heavily strewn in places with boulders, as its name implies, and with many outcroppings of black volcanic stone. Fruit-ranches cling to some of its slopes, but scarcely any of the top is under cultivation, and much of the soil, indeed, is too thin and stony to be arable. With its twisted pines, often as fantastic in form as the cypresses of the California coast, and its gnarled and stunted oaks, the landscape has a wild and quaint beauty, with more than a hint of the Japanesque in places. . . . Between the emerald of the buckeyes, the gray-green of the pines, the golden and dark bluish greens of the oaks, I caught glimpses of the snow-white Sierras to the east, and the faint blue of the Coast Range to the west, beyond the pale and lilac levels of the Sacramento Valley.[2]

Building the house took several years. In 1907, about the time the Smiths moved into their new house, young Smith graduated from the Auburn grammar school. He passed the examinations for the high school but decided not to attend it. Already a voracious reader, he had been writing juvenile stories—mainly oriental romances—and poems. He had, he said, decided to be a poet, and he was sure that he could educate himself better than the Auburn high school could educate him.

In this opinion he may not have been entirely wrong. The law did not then compel him to continue his formal education, nor did his parents insist upon it. The decision, however, affected Smith's later life and not in favorable ways. While his withdrawal from the normal schoolboy milieu may or may not have made him a better poet, it also, probably, contributed to his later frustrating difficulties in making a living.

Smith's method of self-education was to read an unabridged dictionary through, word for word, studying not only the definitions of the words but also their derivations from ancient languages. Having an extraordinary eidetic memory, he seems to have retained most or all of it. When he became a commercial writer, he constantly disconcerted his readers by dropping in rare words like "fulvous," "cerement," and "mignard." The poem quoted at the head of this article affords examples. No other writer, I am sure, ever called a man's head his "cephalic appendage." The other main course in Smith's self-education was to read the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* through at least twice.

Smith passed several years of adolescence as a weedy, wiry youth, reading,

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writing, doing farm chores, and sometimes hiring out to other farmers. In 1909, Timeus Smith undertook chicken farming. Clark Ashton Smith built the henhouse but found cleaning it his most obnoxious task. To eke out the family's minute income, Fanny Smith sold magazine subscriptions in Auburn.

THE YEARS 1910-12 brought Clark Ashton Smith a sudden spurt of premature fame and success. Hence he can be excused for thinking that his unconventional ideas for a poet's proper education had been right after all.

First, he sold several stories. These were undistinguished tales of oriental adventure but up to the professional standards of the popular fiction of the time. Two appeared in *The Black Cat,* published since 1895 in Boston by H. D. Umbstaetter. *The Black Cat* was not a magazine of science fiction or fantasy but of general popular short stories. It published tales by Ellis Parker Butler, Octavus Roy Cohen, Jack London, Rex Stout, and other successful entertainers of the time. It also published an occasional imaginative story of the kind later called science fiction or fantasy; for instance: London's "A Thousand Deaths" (May, 1899; mad scientist on a South Sea island) or Don Mark Lemon's "The White Death" (July, 1902; gigantic hypnotic Mexican tarantula).

Smith's tales were not of this kind but were simple adventures. "The Mahout" appeared in the issue of August, 1911; "The Raja and the Tiger" in that of April, 1912. He sold two similar stories to *The Overland Monthly,* published in San Francisco.

Then, Smith's poetry began to be taken seriously. At thirteen, he had become an enthusiast for Poe's verse. At fifteen, he became likewise infatuated with that of George Sterling. Sterling (1869-1926) had moved from his native New York State to California in 1892 and had become a protegé of Ambrose Bierce—"bitter Bierce," the misanthropic writer, poet, journalist, and satirist, whose stories include several examples of imaginative fiction.

In 1913, Bierce went to Mexico to cover the civil war between Venustiano Carranza and a former bandit and cattle rustler who operated under the alias of Pancho Villa. Bierce attached himself to Villa but soon dropped out of sight forever. There are various tales of his end. One of the more plausible is that Bierce, with an exaggerated idea of his immunity as an American, walked in on Villa and denounced him to his face, calling him a mere brigand and saying that he was going over to Carranza. As Bierce left, Villa told his men: "Shoot him!" And they did.

Sterling had become the leader of the artistic colony at Carmel, on the California coast, and married Caroline Rand. A tall, handsome, athletic man, he was also an incorrigible bohemian, full of contradictions: charming and convivial, often infinitely kind and generous, but mercurial and irresponsible. He was sensible in advising others but erratic and self-indulgent in his own affairs and, like many poets, a perpetual Don Juan.

Smith now began to publish his poems in local periodicals. He was also asked to read his poems to ladies' clubs. The ladies saw a thin, shy youth not yet 20, with a broad forehead and narrow chin, wearing a well-worn brown suit and mumbling poems of cosmic doom and degeneracy. What they could hear of Smith's verses horrified rahter than edified them.

In 1911, Emily I. Hamilton, who taught English at the Auburn high school, persuaded Smith to write George Sterling to ask for criticism. Thus began a corre-

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spondence that lasted to Sterling's death.

As a letter writer, Smith was not nearly so prolific or so self-revealing as Lovecraft. Although numerous, his letters, compared to HPL's, seem rather short and dryly impersonal. With Sterling, however, Smith let down his hair. He often burst out with hatred of Auburn: "hell-hole," "sink hole of creation," "nothing but a cage, and with little gilding on the bars at that," "impested haunt if Philistines and rattlesnakes." "To most of the people here, I'm only a crazy chump who imagines he can write poetry."

Sterling showed Smith's poems to Bierce, who waxed enthusiastic. But Smith never met Bierce and always regretted the missed opportunity.

In June, 1912, Smith went to Carmel for a month's visit with Sterling. It was a memorable experience, to which Smith often later alluded to. But he found the pressure of many personalities, even in so relaxed an atmosphere as that of hobohemian Carmel, more painful than pleasant. When Sterling invited him back next year, he declined, saying:

"Your saying that Carmel will be livelier this summer, is no inducement to *me*. You know I don't much care about meeting people."

During the visit, Sterling introduced Smith to a translation of the poems of Baudelaire. Charles Pierre Baudelaire had been the leader of the French "Decadent" school, writing about things that the taste of the time deemed "morbid" or "unwholesome." Baudelaire lived on a small trust fund, kept a colored mistress, fought a battle with the censors, translated Poe into French, drank heavily, ate opium, tried hashish but decided against it, and died from the effects of his excesses in 1867 at 46.

Smith had hardly returned home when a retired diplomat named Boutwell Dunlap whisked him off to San Francisco to introduce him to useful people and to earn brownie points by "discovering" Smith. The latter proved shyly inarticulate with Dunlap's business-class friends but opened up with the reporters. The papers duly hailed Smith as "the boy poet" and the "poetic genius" of "the lonely Sierras," the compeer of Byron, Shelley, and Keats.

Learning that Sterling was in San Francisco, Smith tried to get in touch with him. But Sterling, in the throes of one of his love affairs, sidestepped the contact. Instead, Dunlap presented Smith to the publisher A. M. Robinson, who had brought out a volume of Sterling's verse. Smith submitted his crop of poems, and in November Robinson published them as *The Star-Treader and Other Poems*. The book got mixed reviews, some good and some abusing Smith for his "sinister" and "ghoulish" qualities.

In 1912, Ambrose Bierce wrote to a Western magazine, warning that, while Smith was a very promising young poet, this premature publicity and exaggerated praise might be bad for him and lead to an equally exaggerated reaction against him. The great professional cynic's prophecy was not put to the test, for the next year Smith's health broke down. For eight years he was intermittently reduced to semi-invalidism, although it is not known what ailed him. (Lovecraft had a similar breakdown at about the same time.)

Smith complained of nervous disorders, depression, sore joints, digestive upsets, and "malarial symptoms." The local physician thought he had incipient tuberculosis. But this doubtful diagnosis was never confirmed, and Smith showed no signs of tuberculosis in later life. He declined Sterling's offer to put him into a saitarium.

During this time, Smith continued his

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correspondence with Sterling. While he had not liked San Francisco on his previous visit, finding the crowds oppressive, in 1915 he went thither as Sterling's guest to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. He entered into correspondence with Lovecraft's lifelong friend Samuel Loveman. He composed many poems and did stints of farm labor.

Smith also learned what somebody should have told him sooner: that poetry is not commercial. In twentieth-century America, in general, one simply cannot make a living at it. Therefore one must have a trade or profession or business and compose one's verse on the side. *The Star Treader* had sold well over a thousand copies, which is good for a first volume of poems by an unknown. But Smith got only $50 in royalties from it, plus an occasional $5.00 from periodicals that published single poems.

Smith, however, had never been trained for anything but verse. In 1915, while he and his father were driving a shaft on the tract in a vain hope of striking gold, Smith wrote: "I may find myself confronted in the disagreeable necessity of earning a living. I'm really as ill-prepared for that as if I had been brought up in affluence . . . I don't feel in the least like work. I seem unfit for anything but pleasure, and precious little of that has ever come my way."

He wrote to Sterling about his financial needs, suggesting a loan of $1,500 to $2,000 to put his father's chicken business on a sound footing. No loan was forthcoming, but in 1917 an anonymous lady admirer of Smith's verse arranged to pay him a small monthly stipend through Sterling. This continued for three and a half years. When it ended, Smith wrote resignedly: ". . . if I work for a living, I will have to give up my art. I've not the energy for both. And I hardly know what I could do—I'm 'unskilled labor' at anything except drawing and poetry . . . Nine hours of work on week days leaves me too tired for any mental effort."

The unskilled labor into which he drifted consisted largely of woodcutting and fruit picking. He railed against Auburn: "If it weren't for my people, I'd hoof it out of this—!—!—! rotten country tomorrow . . ." Since his parents had been around forty when he was born, they were now in their late sixties, and he did not feel that he could walk out on them.

Following a poetic tradition that was probably old in Homer's day, Smith entered upon a long series of love affairs with married women of Auburn. Rumors of his success in this department failed to enhance his popularity with their husbands. Although Smith shunned marriage, he was the one man of the Three Musketeers of *Weird Tales*—Lovecraft, Howard, and Smith—on whose normal male sexuality nobody has ever cast any doubt. In fact, he seems to have been unusually well endowed in this regard.

He published two more volumes of verse: *Odes and Sonnets* (1918) and *Ebony and Crystal* (1922), with the usual meager returns. He received kudos from Californian literary societies. In 1920, he composed a celebrated long poem in blank verse, *The Hashish Eater:*

> *Bow down: I am the emperor of dreams;*
> *I crown me with the million-coloured sun*
> *Of secret worlds incredible, and take*
> *Their trailing skies for vestment, when I soar,*
> *Throned on the mounting zenith, and illume*
> *The spaceward-flown horizons infinite . . .*[3]

He assured Sterling: "Don't worry about my experimenting with hashish. Life is enough of a nightmare without

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drugs and I feel content to take the effects on hearsay."

As SMITH'S HEALTH improved through the 1920s (his late twenties and early thirties), he added mining, fruit packing, well digging, typing, and journalism to his occupations. If none of these brought him affluence, at least he showed more gumption in getting jobs than Lovecraft ever did. He had no genteel inhibitions against turning his hand to rough outdoor work of any kind. He contributed a column to *The Auburn Journal* and sometimes worked as its night editor.

In 1922, he began correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft and illustrated one of HPL's early stories in *Home Brew*. He studied French in order to translate Baudelaire and got a fair reading and writing knowledge of that tongue, in which he composed original poems. Lacking Franco phone contacts, he had no way of mastering the spoken form. He dabbled in drawing and painting and sold a few pictures for $5.00 or $10.00 each.

Then Smith lost his Guru, Sterling. Unable longer to brook his non-support and adulteries, Sterling's wife divorced him in 1915 and three years later killed herself. In 1926, Sterling was found dead of poison in the Bohemian Club of San Francisco. Although his death was commonly deemed suicide, attributed to failing powers and alcoholism, Smith doubted this, pointing to Sterling's lively plans for the future. He thought that Sterling had taken poison by error for a sleeping potion while confused by illness. There is no way to test this theory.

IN 1929, when the Great Depression began, Smith's parents grew feebler. Timeus Smith, 74, suffered from high blood pressure and a weak heart. Clark Ashton Smith was now 36. He stood 5 feet, 10 and a fraction inches tall and weighed around 140 pounds, with a large chest. Although he had filled out since youth, he was still lean, but powerfully muscled from hard physical labor. He wore his brown hair somewhat long and straggly and sported a wispy mustache. His weather-worn features were not unhandsome, although heavy-lidded eyes gave him a slightly Oriental look.

A fairly heavy pipe and cigarette smoker, he drank—sometimes heavily but then again restricting himself to a glass of wine—often home-made—a day. His general *persona* was politely reserved and rather taciturn, save when somebody got him to open up on one of his literary or poetic enthusiasms. He took to wearing berets, at least one of them red. Now, the beret is an admirably practical headgear, but the small-town America of that time viewed it much as it does the long hair of rebellious youth today.

Evidently, the casual labor on which Smith had relied would not suffice to keep his aged parents. Smith had long since decided that he did not wish to work regular hours, would not work indoors, hated Auburn, and could not bear to live in a city. These self-imposed tabus left him few choices. He said: "My conception of pleasure is one that the modern world would doubtless think hopelessly bucolic, idyllic and antiquated, since there is nothing I like better than to wander in the vernal woods with a beloved mistress . . .[4]

Through the 1920s, Smith had been reading Lovecraft's stories. Smith had written practically no prose fiction except some little imaginative vignettes in florid language, called "prose poems." He had sold several poems and one old story, "The Ninth Skeleton," to *Weird Tales*.

In 1929, one of Smith's lady friends talked him into trying his hand at prose fiction again. She he wrote "The Last Incantation," which appeared in *Weird*

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Tales for June, 1930. It is a charming little fable, just over a thousand words long, in Smith's meticulously polished prose. The aged Atlantean wizard Malygris commands his familiar demon to fetch him Nylissa, the sweetheart he would have wedded in youth had she not died. The demon obeys. At first Malygris is in rapture. But then he observes that this Nylissa is not nearly so beautiful as he remembers her; in fact, she is just a very ordinary girl. Malygris dismisses the phantom and complains to the demon.

> "It was indeed Nylissa whom you summoned and saw," replied the viper. "Your necromancy was potent up to this point; but no necromantic spell could recall for you your own lost youth or the fervent and guileless heart that loved Nylissa, or the ardent eyes that beheld her then. This, my master, was the thing that you had to learn."[5]

Finding that he could make more money writing stories, even at the low rates and late payments of *Weird Tales,* than by picking plums and cherries and chopping firewood, Smith plunged whole-heartedly into his new career. During the next six years, he turned out stories at a rate of over one a month, despite the fact that he was a careful worker who revised and rewrote a lot. Of Smith's approximately 110 stories, a large majority were written during this period, although some of these were not published until the 1940s and 50s.

Over half of Smith's stories were published in *Weird Tales.* Others appeared in *Amazing Detective Tales,* AMAZING STORIES, *Astounding Stories, Fantastic Universe, Fantasy and Science Fiction, Fantasy Fiction, Fantasy Magazine, La Paree Stories, Magic Carpet, Oriental Stories, Philippine Magazine, Saturn Science Fiction and Fantasy, Scientific Detective Monthly, Stirring Science Stories, Snappy Stories, Startling Stories, Strange Tales, Tales of Wonder, (Thrilling) Wonder Stories,* and fan magazines. Many have been reprinted in anthologies and reprint magazines. Some, like "The Holiness of Azédarac," were based upon Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, to whose sinister library of pseudobiblia Smith added the baleful *Book of Eibon.*

Some stories written during this spurt were more or less conventional science fiction. Many were fantasies laid in the supposed lost continents of Hyperborea and Atlantis, in the imaginary medieval land of Malneant, and on the magic-haunted planet Xiccarph. Others were placed on the future continent Zothique (rhymes with "seek"). This will be the last large land mass to remain above the waters when the sun shall have dimmed, science shall have been forgotten, and the ancient magics shall rise again, bringing back their sinister gods and demons in more frightful guise than ever.

The stories of Klarkash-Ton (as Lovecraft called him, meaning simply "Clark Ashton") are unlike those of anyone else. Readers either love them or hate them but are seldom indifferent. Smith wrote in an elaborately euphuistic style, bedizened with rare words (some of which Farnsworth Wright, editing *Weird Tales,* made him take out). He had a monstrously vivid imagination. Like Lovecraft, he drew upon the nightmares that had plagued him during youthful spells of sickness. He also had a keenly ironic sense of humor and an uninhibited bent for the macabre. Nobody since Poe has so loved a well-rotted corpse.

Even one of his more conventional science-fiction stories, "The Dweller in the Gulf," is one of the most gruesome ever written. An expedition to Mars encounters a monster, which apparently subsists on interplanetary explorers' eye-

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balls, being equipped with special appenadages for extracting them.

Smith's published stories were all quite short. He planned or began several novels but never finished any, finding the greater lengths uncongenial. Lovecraft wrote:

> Mr. Smith has for his background a universe of remote and paralysing fright—jungles of poisonous and iridescent blossoms on the moons of Saturn, evil and grotesque temples in Atlantis, Lemuria, and forgotten elder worlds, and dank morasses of spotted death-fungi beyond earth's rim.... In sheer daemonic strangeness and fertility of conception, Mr. Smith is perhaps unexcelled by any other writer dead or living. Who else has seen such gorgeoud, luxuriant, and feverishly distorted visions of infinite spheres and multiple dimensions and lived to tell the tale?[6]

Many of Smith's readers have seen what they thought was Lord Dunsany's influence in his stories. Smith himself said that, while he had read Dunsany, he thought that he had been much more influenced by Poe, Bierce, and the early stories of Robert W. Chambers.

Although Smith stayed in Auburn during these years, his stories brought him a new circle of admirers—the science-fiction fans, some of whom came to see him from time to time. They found a curious menage. Fanny Smith, now in her eighties and in failing heath, still ruled the family. When she sent Timeus to Auburn for supplies, she gave him a schedule, and woe betide him if he failed to adhere to the time table. Fanny had become obsessed with the idea that, unless watched, poor old Timeus would gallop off in lustful pursuit of Auburn's damsels.

Smith's friends included Benjamin De Casseres (rhymes with "mass array") and his wife. Decasseres had contributed to *The Black Cat,* become a popular poet in the 1920s, and published a book of poems called *The Shadow Eater,* with splendidly ghoulish black-and-white illustrations by Wallace Smith. I remember the lines:

The weird ululation of fiends
On the brackish waters of time . . .

I have no idea what that means, but it still gives a *frisson.* These lines also admirably sum up the spirit of Smith's prose and verse. De Casseres compared Smith's poetry to that of Poe, Baudelaire, Shelley, Rimbaud, Keats, and Blake. Other knowledgeable critics were equally enthusiastic about Smith's verse.

In 1933, Smith began corresponding with Robert E. Howard, the Texan creator of Conan. Howard, too, wrote vigorous, colorful, imaginative verse, but on a much smaller scale than Smith, who composed over 700 poems. Nor did REH take his poetry so seriously as Smith took his. For three years, Smith, Howard and Lovecraft were the unquestioned leaders of the *Weird Tales* school of fiction and close corresponding friends, although they never met. The writer of oriental fantasies, Edgar Hoffmann Price, is the only man known to have met all three in the flesh.

In 1934, the older Smiths' growing debility caused Smith's fiction to taper off. He also began to experiment with sculpture. This consisted of creepy little figurines, carved in a soft stone such as talc with a pocket knife and hardened by baking. They resemble the little uglies that tourists buy in Mexico and Central America, which are mostly modern imitations of aboriginal idols. Some of Smith's statuettes look like miniatures of the Easter Island statues. He sold many such carvings for a few dollars each.

In September, 1935, Fanny Smith died.

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Smith spent the next two years nursing his father through his last illness. He continued his stone carving, began a few stories, and completed fewer. In December, 1937, Timeus died in his turn.

His parents' deaths practically ended Smith's fictional career. The last three years had left him exhausted from single-handedly nursing two old people and running the house and tract. In a letter to the fan Robert H. Barlow, Smith had written that he had "fully and absolutely made up my mind to quit the hell-bedunged and heaven-bespitted country when my present responsibilities are over." But when the time came, he did not.

Barlow was an assiduous correspondent of Lovecraft and other members of the HPL-*WT* circle. As a young man, he dabbled in various arts and sciences. When Lovecraft died in 1937, Barlow acted for a while as his literary executor, precipitating a quarrel among some members of the Circle.

Later, Barlow went to Mexico, where he became a distinguished archaeologist. Along with Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, he is credited with putting the chronology of the pre-Columbian Valley of Mexico—that is, the dating of the Toltec and Aztec cultures—on a sound basis. In 1951, he killed himself over the threat of the exposure of his homosexuality.

In the 1930s, Barlow was in his Communist phase. He tried to convert Smith, who would have none of it: "No matter what system you have—capitalism, Fascism, Bolshevism—the greed and power-lust of men will produce the same widespread injustice, the same evils and abuses . . . I would be strictly non-assimilable in any sort of co-operative society, and would speedily end up in a concentration camp."[7] Smith condemned authoritarian governments of any sort, recognizing their utter intolerance of nonconformists like himself.

Smith even hoped to make a trip to New York, though he still had no wish to live in a city. After his father died, he did in fact travel a little but only to nearby places like Carmel. Having become set in his ways, he soon returned to Indian Ridge and his mildly reclusive life.

He wrote Derleth that he was "trying to settle down to literary production again," although he found the necessary concentration "abominably hard." But somehow he never did. He made many statuettes and composed more poems. He taught himself Spanish, as he had done with French. But stories he produced only at intervals of years: the tales actually completed after 1937 could be counted on the fingers of two hands. *Weird Tales*'s simultaneous loss of its three outstanding writers—Lovecraft, Howard, and Smith, two by death and one by virtual withdrawal from the field—probably initiated its long decline.

Smith had the satisfaction of seeing books of his stories published by Derleth's Arkham House. The first of these, *Out of Space and Time* (1942) and *Lost Worlds* (1944) were each issued in a printing of 2,000 copies. They sold slowly, went out of print, and became collectors' costly rarities. Derleth published five more volumes of Smith's prose and two of his verse, and at his death in 1971 had a large volume of Smith's poems in press. Many of Smith's stories are being reprinted in paperback.

Smith's last decade saw extensive changes in his life. In 1954, he married Carolyn Jones Dorman, who had been married before and had three children. For several years, he alternated between the house on Indian Ridge and his wife's house in Pacific Grove. He had sold most of Timeus Smith's tract. Then he quarreled with a real-estate developer who

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wished to buy the remaining lot and put pressure on Smith through legal and political connections to sell. In 1957, the old house burned—the Smiths said by arson; others, by accident. The Smiths sold the remaining lot and moved permanently to Pacific Grove.

To meet expenses, Smith (who now wore a small gray beard) did gardening, which he hated, for the other residents. In 1961 he suffered strokes, which greatly slowed him. A last attempt at a science-fiction story proved unpublishable, and in August of that year he quietly died in his sleep, aged 68.

THE DEVOTEE of heroic fantasy wonders: if Smith could write so many superlative stories of their kind from 1929 to 1935, why did he not resume his fiction, after his father's death, on his former scale? The answer seems to be that he regarded himself mainly as a poet who wrote prose only to pay his decrepid parents' bills.

This brings up another irony: Smith bitterly complained of being tied to hated Auburn. He implied that, but for having to care for two helpless old people, he would roam the wide world. In fact, if he had not so desperately needed money during his parents' decline, he might never have buckled down to fiction at all. So the very factor that so irked him also forced him into doing his beat-remembered work.

Years before, he had written Sterling that writing prose was "a hateful task, for a poet, and wouldn't be necessary in any true civilization." He much preferred poetry and, after his parents' deaths, rock carving. The deaths of Lovecraft and Howard may also have discouraged Smith from resuming his stories, since he no longer had their voluminous correspondence to spur him on.

Smith also suffered from his own artistic versatility. He worked in poetry, prose fiction, sculpture, and picturing. Any one of these is enough to absorb all a man's energy, and to master all four at once is a practical impossibility.

In pursuing the graphic and plastic arts without formal training, moreover, I think that Smith made a profound mistake. These arts are those wherein, as in boxing among sports, the gap yawns widest between the amateur and the professional and the self-taught man has little chance. But, living where he did and avoiding cities, Smith had no opportunity for formal training.

He realized his lack but took a stubbornly independent line: "Of course, I lack technical training, in the academic sense. But I don't care much more for the literalness of academic painting than I do for the geometrical abstractions of some of the modernists . . . As for getting instruction, I doubt if my ideals would be understood or sympathized with by the average teacher. I'll have to work it out in my own way."[7] So his pictures remained at best talented primitives.

Lord Dunsany could likewise dabble in drawing and sculpture as well as prose and poetry. His weird drawings, in fact, are reminiscent of Smith's. But Dunsany had an inherited estate, which enabled him to do as he pleased. Smith did not.

FOR A LAST QUESTION: Whatever happened to Smith's poetry, so extravagantly praised when it appeared? One might think that it had all been buried with its author, as was said of the composer Anton Rubinstein's music.

There was nothing wrong with Smith's poetry, which is of high quality: vivid, stirring, evocative, colorful in a lush *fin-de-siècle* way, super-imaginative, and technically polished. But public taste is ever changing unpredictably; that is why there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as progress in the arts.

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During the last half-century, American poetry, under the influence of Ezra Pound and others, has gone off in a direction quite different from the verse of Smith and Howard. Although Smith wrote some free verse, most of his poetry is in fixed forms, with rhyme and rhythm and predetermined numbers of feet per line. Nearly all contemporary American poetry is in free verse.

Now free verse, in the hands of a Whitman or an Emily Dickinson, can be very effective. But, however effective, it cannot be remembered anywhere nearly so easily as verse in fixed forms. In fact, the distinctive features of fixed-form verse—rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, fixed numbers of syllables or feet, and the rest—were invented as mnemonic devices back in primitive, preliterate days to make it easier to pass on the tribal wisdom without losing pieces of it with each transmission. Therefore, while Americans of a century hence may well remember "Half a league, half a league, half a league onward . . ." or "Lars Porsena of Clusium, by the Nine Gods he swore . . .", all the vast masses of *vers libre* now being ground out will probably be forgotten by all save writers of Ph. D. theses.

Moreover, even if free verse can sometimes be effective, most of it is not. To me at least, it looks like turgid prose, full of strained figures of speech and obscure locutions and chopped into arbitrary short lines. The main advantage of this formless "verse" is that it is easy to do. It is lazy man's poetry. Anybody, even a child or a computer, can do it. This makes it popular, since in the present climate of super-egalitarianism it is often thought that if a task cannot be done by everyone, it ought not to be done at all. To do or admire something that requires outstanding talent, arduous effort, and austere self-discipline is elitism, and that is a wicked thing.

Some leading poets, however, tell me that a reaction, with a return to fixed forms, is likely soon. Then Smith's verse may come into its own.

IN VIEWING Smith's life, it is hard not to become a little impatient with the inept, unrealistic way this brilliant, erudite, decent, hypersensitive, imaginative, creative, and romantic-minded man conducted his worldly affairs. It would have been one thing if he had serenely accepted an impoverished existence on the outskirts of Auburn. But he did not; he hated Auburn and complained of his lot. At the same time, he did little to change that lot. In fact, his attitudes—his phobias against formal education, indoor work, and city life—combined with his parents' long debility to condemn him to Indian Ridge willy nilly.

But then, one ought not to expect a gifted poet to be also a model of shrewdness, prudence, practicality, efficiency, foresight, and commercial acumen. If all

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Sierran Shaman

NOTES

1. Clark Ashton Smith: *Don Quixote on Market Street,* in *Weird Tales* for March, 1953, copyright 1953 by Weird Tales; C.A.S.: *The Dark Chateau* (Arkham House, 1951), p. 25.

2. C.A.S.: "The Ninth Skeleton," in *Weird Tales* for Sep. 1928, copyright 1928 by Popular Fiction Publishing Co.; C.A.S.: *Genus Loci* (Arkham House, 1948), pp. 26f.

3. Lin Carter (ed.): *New Worlds for Old* (Ballantine, 1971), p. 279.

4. Letter to Samuel Loveman, 14 Apr. 1929.

5. *Weird Tales* for June, 1930, copyright 1930 by Popular Fiction Publishing

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Co.; C.A.S.: *Lost Worlds* (Arkham House, 1944), p. 90.

6. H. P. Lovecraft: "Supernatural Horror in Literature," in *The Outsider and Others* (Arkham House, 1939), p. 538.

7. Letter to R. H. Barlow, 16 May, 1936; in the Lovecraft Collection at Brown University.

8. Letter to G. Sterling, 28 Sep. 1926, in the Sterling Collection at the New York Public Library.

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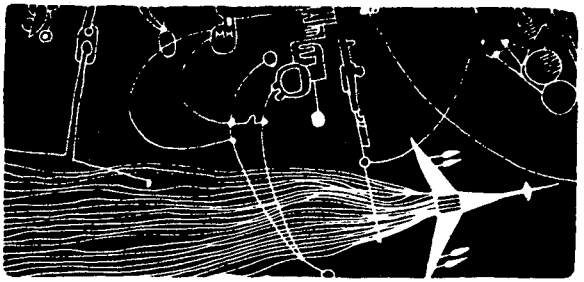

fantasy books

—reviewed by Fritz Leiber—

LOVECRAFT: A LOOK BEHIND THE "CTHULHU MYTHOS," by Lin Carter, Ballantine Books, 1972, 95¢, 198 pp.

This is the best single-book or article I have read dealing with Howard Phillips Lovecraft, his life, his works, The Cthulhu Mythos and the many writers who contributed to it before and after Lovecraft's death in 1937, and pertinent associated material—a book that is accurate and well balanced and *sensible* (in the sense of common sense). It is, in one of its dimensions, a critical summation of the vast amount of material about Lovecraft that has been brought out by Arkham House, the almost single-handed publishing achievement of August Derleth, who as a teen-ager was corresponding regularly with Lovecraft in 1926 and who has just now died in July 1971.

I imagine Carter's book could not have been done much earlier. It was natural—and *good*, both for emotional and promotional reasons—that Derleth should at first have snarled at anyone making the least criticism of HPL and his writings, life, and attitudes.

It was likewise natural that Lovecraft and Derleth, because they rated supernatural over science fiction (chiefly a semantic quarrel in the end), should have become the targets of some notable science-fiction writers and critics—Damon Knight, Avram Davidson, etc.

It has to be admitted, here, that in supernatural-horror fiction the protagonist is generally a helpless victim of cosmic forces, dead afterwords, or only babbling of his escape. While science fiction protagonists more often solve the dreadful problem facing them and gain knowledge of the unknown.

Although Carter's book is not a biography of Lovecraft, as he repeatedly assures us, it does make several of the crucial points about him. That his hatred of Jews, Italians, Poles, and other immigrants to the U.S.A. was fringe-pathological. That he over-rated publication in the magazine *Weird Tales* and denigrated science-fiction magazines to an unreasonable degree. That he refused to take the chance of becoming editor of *Weird Tales* because it would have involved moving to Chicago, so far from his beloved Providence and New York, the latter hated but still within shouting distance of New England. That many of his early stories derived from his admiration of Lord Dunsany and Poe. That he over-

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used adjectives, especially of the "eldritch" variety. That he perhaps hurried his death by a miserly, quirkish diet.

Yet Carter's book also pays homage to Lovecraft's innovations in science fiction of the horror variety. A very competent job.

TAU ZERO, by Poul Anderson, Doubleday, 1970, $4.95, 208 pp.

Anderson has gradually become a writer of remarkable versatility. Hard science fiction; detection; *Unknown*-type fantasy; medieval fantasy, especially that of the Norse-Viking variety.

Here, in a space ship that gets out of control and keeps going faster and faster, until because of the Einsteinian equations it sees the universe *age* and works toward its Ragnarok, he has to my mind created the best long-range vision of the cosmos since Stapledon's *Starmaker*. Incidental to this, he takes up—and solves in a hard science-fictional fashion—the problem of how a spaceship travelling close to the speed of light might deal with the destructive friction of "empty" space containing one hydrogen ion or molecule per cubic yard. It is a story based on the pulsating universe, which expands and then contracts, eternally. It allows—rationally—for a spaceship to pitch and roll and toss, like a clipper ship, as it speeds through the hearts of galaxies—a favorite concept of early science-fiction writers, who generally managed it, however, irrationally (or by hunch), or simply on the analogy of old sailing vessels.

Aboard Anderson's spaceship are a crew of 50 super-Mensa-type humans—25 female, 25 male—who are also the idealized dream of people of the sort who have gone on to found the Society for Creative Anachronism. They are loyal to their ship, they work like hell, but they have a lot of time left over to fence, to create new foods and drinks and medieval-modern garments, to have affaires—a magnificent elite!

At the beginning, Earth is ruled by Sweden, chief neutral survivor of a third world war—a charming and desirable concept.

And I must close this review with abbreviated quotes from one of the songs Anderson has created for this book:

"It makes no diff'rence where I end up when I die,
"Up to heaven or down to hell come,
"I've got friends to make me welcome,"

And: "It's not certain we'll get liquor when we die,
"Let us then drink hell for leather
"Now tonight when we're together. . . ."

THE COMPLETE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA, *The Lion, the Witch the Wardrobe, Prince Caspian, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, the Silver Chair, The Horse and His Boy, The Magician's Nephew, The Last Battle*, by Clive Staples Lewis, 1971, £1.60 in England (the set), Puffin Books, Penguin Books Limited, Bath Road, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England .85¢ apiece in Canada, not for sale in the United States for copyrights reasons which I have been unable to discover.

Lewis's *Malacandra* (or *Out of the Silent Planet*) was the best SF novel I ever read as far as a landing on an alien planet—Mars—was concerned, despite

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meteorites pitter-pattering like rain on the spaceship's hull during its voyage (instead of shooting holes through it).

His *Perelandra* began with 20 pages or so of a brilliant picture of an aquarian Venus, but then got very preachy, in the style of many of Lewis's theological books, of which the best-known is perhaps *The Screwtape Letters*—instructions by an older devil to a younger devil on how best to tempt humans to damnation. *That Hideous Strength*, another attack on science, I have not read.

It strikes me that these seven children's books of the fabled world of Narnia are his consistently finest literary creation. Four British children first break into Narnia through the back door of a wardrobe filled with fur coats. In Narnia they meet a faun, Mr. Tumnus, the horrible and beautiful White Witch, several charming beavers, and finally Aslan the Lion, who is a wonderful combination of Christ, a vegetation god, England, and several other source-figures.

The six other books continue the adventures of these and other British children in Narnia. They are all very charmingly covered and illustrated by beautiful drawings and paintings by Pauline Baynes.

Dean Dickinsheet tells me that a similar series of books were written by Edith Nesbit: *The Story of the Amulet, The Five Children and It, The Sand Fairies* (with a Persian background), and *The Phonenix on the Carpet*. Edith Nesbit, Dickensheet tells me, was a Fabian Socialist in Edwardian times and regarded a pariah by the Establishment.

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, by Anthony Burgess, Ballantine Books, (fifth printing, October 1971), 95¢, 191 pp.

I re-review this horrorshow good novel (horrorshow derives equally from the Russian *khorosho* meaning "good"—a brilliant example of Burgess' invented folk etymology) chiefly because of the Kubrick film version it has inspired.

I wonder whatever became of the film about Napoleon Kubrick was supposed to be doing after the phenomenally successful *2001*. Surely the cinema *Waterloo*, starring a sad, sad, sad Rod Steiger as the emperor returned from Elba and forever scratching his ulcered tummy, did not preclude it.

At any rate, we now have *A Clockwork Orange* as a movie. A movie which shows how fast times are changing these days, in that its anti-hero Alex becomes an anti-Establishment joke rather than a vicious juvenile delinquent.

In the book, Alex's rape of two teeny-bopper girls whom he has got drunk is merely disgusting. In the film it becomes a Keystone-Cops, speeded-action sequence with Alex jumping in and out of bed with obviously mature and willing broads. While the rape of Mr. Alexander's wife, horrorshow horrible in the book, is as stylized as a ballet, minimizing again the viciousness of Alex.

When I first read this book, as published in hardcover by Norton, I had to get a Russian-English dictionary to understand its *nadsat* (teen-age) Slavic slang. Ballantine is to be forever thanked for including a glossary of seven pages of the Anglo-Russian slang that is the chief language of this book.

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The film, which is short on dialogue, is little bothered with this problem. Like most film-versions, it exaggerates wildly—a country cottage becomes an ultra glass-and-wood, mod, churchlike structure, etc. And it endlessly stylizes—gang fights and rapes and police brutality become a sort of ballet. Yet it is surely one of the 5 best SF films ever, along with *2001*; *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Destination Moon*, and *King Kong* (Which Poul Anderson tells me is titled *Kong King* in Sweden, since *kong* means "king" in Swedish and *king* is just a name).

The five best fantasy films are harder to choose. Personally at this monent, I would make them out as Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* and *The Magician*, Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits*, Coctean's *Orpheus*, and Rene Clair's *Beauties of the Night*. Though Woodie Allen's new *Play it Again Sam*, where a Bogart-fan begins to hallucinate Bogart as a mentor-figure, is a bright contender.

ASIMOV'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE, VOLUME ONE, THE GREEK, ROMAN AND ITALIAN PLAYS; VOLUME TWO, THE ENGLISH PLAYS, by Isaac Asimov, Doubleday, 1970, $25, 1566 pp.

I include here these two big books ($12.50 apiece and well worth it) because (1) I am an Asimov fan; (2) Shakespeare was a fantasy and supernatural horror writer, as witness *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Macbeth*; (3) my father and mother were Shakespearean actors; he toured his own company between 1918 and 1934-35; I played in it in the seasons of 1928 and 1934-35, and helped create a new cutting of *King Lear*.

Asimov, wisely avoiding any critical or metaphysical remarks, confines himself to giving the actual (as now thought) historical, geographical, mythological, and legendary backgrounds of the plays, and explaining the more difficult references in them, especially those regarding the Bible. There is a map for each play and some genealogies and it tells their stories.

Asimov has planned his writing career cunningly. His history books (*The Egyptians*, etc.) take us up to the reign of King John in England. *The English Plays* takes up there through the War of the Roses (Lancaster and York) into the reigns of Henry the Eighth and Queen Elizabeth the First (beloved Gloriana, celebrated recently in Don Fryer's *Songs and Sonnets Atlantean*, the last book to be published by Arkham House during August Derleth's lifetime).

Did you know that Macbeth was actually one of Scotland's very good kings and ruled 17 years? And that he probably killed the young (not old) king Duncan in battle rather than bed? And that his wife's name was Gruoch?

That Juliet was 13 years old chiefly to make it plausible for her to take the Capulet-Montague feud more seriously than was deserved? And that her relative, Tybalt the cat-man, was the only one really to take the feud seriously and unnecessarily kill for it, rather like John Wilkes Booth assassinating Lincoln after the Union won the Civil War?

I didn't.

Or that Richard the Third (Dick the Three-Eyes) is possibly the most maligned of English kings, a good one

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guilty perhaps of the deaths of his two nephews but nothing else, but later crucified by Tudor slanders?

Altogether these two volumes are a *must* for all schools and universities, and for Shakespeare—and Asimov—buffs everywhere.

—FRITZ LEIBER

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(continued from page 5)
pattern. What does this mean? It means first of all that 3 out of every 4 dollars received by the convention after August first will be useless to the convention. It means that we will continue to turn down ideas for improvements to the convention for lack of funds, and then will wind up with a $5000.00 surplus.

Surely there must be a solution to this problem. Your suggestions are welcome.

Yours truly,
Chuck Crayne

As a former Worldcon Chairman, I know how tricky it is to second-guess someone else's Worldcon problems, but it seems to me that perhaps the LaCon's experiences may prove a valuable lesson for future convention committees

But first, I'd like to go back to Chuck's first paragraph and clarify a point which I confess I left too ambiguous in my June editorial. It was not my purpose to point an accusing finger at any one specific Worldcon committee for its past performance; I was not interested in pointing out past abuses (if any) but rather in identifying possible future abuses. For that reason, I was necessarily "vague" in my references. However, and to clarify the record, I do not consider the reputations of anyone involved in past or present Worldcons to be "questionable" and I do not care to call anyone into question. I feel that, by and large and allowing for differences in personalities, past Worldcon chairmen have performed their duties honorably, if not always as I personally might have liked to see them done. (No doubt there are those who would say much the same about me.) But when we begin speaking, as Chuck did, of $5000.00 "surpluses," we are speaking of a situation ripe for exploitation, and this is what I was warning against.

Chuck's second paragraph raises a point which is echoed, in spirit, by several of the letters in this issue, principally Darrell Schweitzer's. I think it *is* true that the Hugo voting needs the broadest possible base—and after all, that's what Daniel Tannenbaum's letter several issues back, which kicked off this whole discussion, really addressed itself to. But why assume that "Supporting memberships" *should* cover printing and mailing costs? As I've already pointed out, these costs should be covered by the advertising carried in the convention publications. $3.00 is a purely arbitrary figure, and the amount could be as easily reduced to one dollar.

I don't believe the "supporting" memberships ever provided a convention with any real financial support. Until the late fifties the idea was never broached—and Worldcons cost only one or two dollars to join whether one attended or not. But, as the membership fee climbed, it was pointed out that overseas fans who joined purely to lend the spirit of their support were being harder-pressed; at that time the value of the dollar overseas was much greater than it is now. Thus, the "supporting" or "overseas" membership fee came into existence. It was originally one dollar.

The problem of a convention's need for early money is not an easy one to grapple with. The philosophy in recent times has been that of escalating the membership fees to encourage early registration. But I think this is a backwards approach: most fans see it

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as a penalty for late-joiners rather than an incentive to join early.

I must point again to my own experience. When New York City won the bid in 1966 to hold the 1967 Worldcon, we promptly announced that everyone who joined immediately (at the 1966 Worldcon) could do so at a *discount*—$2.50 instead of the (then) regular $3.00.

We immediately picked up several hundred members and had sufficient operating cash from then on to cover all pre-con expenses. (Later we also received $300.00 from the 1966 Worldcon as a "pass-on" from its surplus.) It seems to me that something of this nature—a cash-on-the-barrelhead discounted membership for those who join immediately—would make much better sense than simply hiking the fees over the following months.

Then there's that "pass-on" from the previous convention. We received, as I said, $300.00—not a munificent sum, really, but comfortable and adequate for our needs. (We passed on $500 to the following convention.) These days, with higher surpluses, larger sums should be passed on. Certainly any past Worldcon chairman can appreciate the value of this for the next convention.

But then, I am simply staggered by Chuck's figure of $2500.00 for film rental—I presume for the all-night movies which Worldcons now feel obligated to produce. I commented on this in last month's AMAZING SF; I'll simply say that I think the movies are unjustified if they tie up this much money in advance of the convention.

I was also a bit surprised at the low number of room reservations and the fact that, as of the end of May, the LACon had gained only half its predicted membership. It's my opinion that this may be due to the reputation (deserved or undeserved) which LACon has picked up for being an expensive-to-attend convention.

In conjuction with this, I should mention a clipping which was passed on to me at the Disclave. It comes from the April, 1972 issue of *The Contract Bridge Bulletin*, a quite professional-looking publication:

LOS ANGELES CALIF . . . *The World Science Fiction Convention is scheduled to meet at the International Hotel here over the Labor Day weekend-and on the program is a sanctioned bridge tournament. It seems that many of the participants and about half the organizing committee are duplicate buffs. We don't know what to make of this, but if you are playing one day and hear a strange whirring sound being emitted by one of your opponents (or even your partner), you might try bidding eight notrump and then sit back and watch the sparks fly.*

A bridge tournament—at a World SF Convention?

FROM TIME TO TIME I have commented upon the growing problems we—and most small-circulation magazines—have had with distribution. Now I'd like to suggest a positive way in which you, the readers, can help us.

For some time now we've been aware that we simply weren't reaching a major share of our potential market—the college or university book stores. Although sf is being taught in more colleges each year, a great many of both the teachers and students are unaware of the sf *magazines*, using books for their classes and relying solely upon books for their knowledge of sf. Yet of

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course many books are novels which were first published in the sf magazines, and the magazines often publish material *about* sf which would be invaluable as study-guides. (The Panshins' *SF in Dimension* is a case in point.)

We have, for several years, urged our national distributor to put our magazines in the college bookstores, but largely without result. Now we are beginning a new program to put the magazines into these stores ourselves.

You can be of real help. If you are aware of a college bookstore in your area which does not carry AMAZING SF and FANTASTIC STORIES, and you'd like to see our magazines stocked in that store, please write directly to our publisher—Mr. Sol Cohen, Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y., 11364. He is now in a position to ship direct orders to such stores, and is presently working out the details of a commission plan whereby you can directly benefit from the sales made through the store(s) in question. Some of you have written to me with just such suggestions in the past and I've had to tell you that we had no way to ship directly to college bookstores. Now we do—so write to Mr. Cohen today. We all stand to benefit.

—TW

THE HOLDING OF KOLYMAR

(continued from page 21)

some other world and in another Time. All night long he knelt, knowing the demons and the imps had fled back into their nether lands when Kyrce died and that the people of the city were safe.

When he rose in the morning light, he was an old man again, for the spells of Kyrce could last only as long as her life. Yet he did not regret the loss of his momentary youth, for now he would die the sooner and go to find Kyrce in those other worlds which the gods say exist beyond a man's dying.

Then Conmoral went home to Isfanare.

—GARDNER F. FOX

TIME KILLER

(continued from page 92)

weeping tears of blood. But he knew the lessons well, the ones they had taught him and the ones he had had to teach himself.

A single, ear-shattering shriek sounded from across the hall.

Now that they have found her the police will arrive too soon, he thought. He estimated his speed on the stairs. But he would not make it. A part of him expected that, too, he now knew, and he felt strangely calmed by the knowledge. He put his eye to the 'scope and zeroed in on the first of the packages.

You know what he did then.

17,488,820 *3,573,495,672*

You know. He started firing in rapid rounds, and kept firing, until the clock was dead.

—DENNIS ETCHISON

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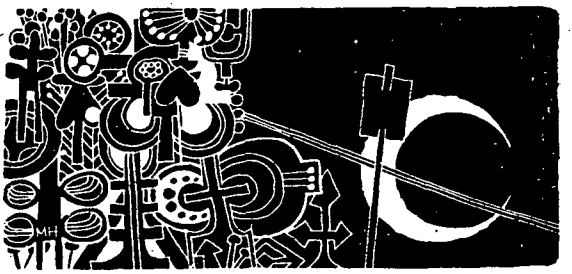

Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on just one side of each sheet of paper, and addressed to According To You, *P.O. Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.*

Dear Ted:

Normally, I wouldn't reply to a review, good or bad; it's infra dig and a bit uncool, I know. But at the SFWA awards party, you asked for my reactions, so . . .

My first quibble is a personal one, a picky one. I was never a "house hack for Charlton." At the time I (and Steve Skeates, and Jim Aparo, and Steve Ditko) was doing stuff for Charlton, under the editorship of Dick Giordano, I was also writing westerns for Marvel, writing my first book, playing political commentator for a magazine called *News Front* and reporting for *Show*. I was, as you might guess, quite hungry that season. And in fact, I look back on some of those Charlton scripts with fondness, particularly the s-f tales ("Children of Doom is among my favorites) and a satire western we called "Wander," brilliantly rendered by Aparo. It was a good experience: I learned much about the craft because Dick allowed unprecedented freedom and, since I was using a pseudonym, I felt free to experiment and make mistakes.

Although National has goofed plenty in the last 30 years—much of what you wrote in *All In Color For A Dime* is dead on—the company wasn't the prime mover behind the Code. Listen—every publisher was in high panic, and they all rushed to help establish the censoring body, and thus keep the Feds away. I hold no brief for censors, and I've had fairly harsh words with the Code administrator in public concerning matters of infantilism and authoritarianism, but the thing *did* do what it was supposed to: cool out the witch hunters.

True, neither Neal Adams nor I get royalties from the *Green Lantern* paperback. However, we *did* get paid something—a flat sum—and I'm cynical enough to believe that wasn't a bad deal. Cynical because I sold a novel last year on royalty basis, and haven't seen even a statement yet. You, among others, have told me this is pretty common practice with some paperback houses. What Neal and I got was the equivelent of an advance which, given the admittedly crappy state of American publishing, is all we could reasonably expect. The Academy of Comic Book Arts is working to improve the situation; wish it luck.

If I have, indeed, said the last lines of the first third of "No Evil Shall Escape My Sight" are some kind of wonderful

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. . . well, I *do* tend toward hyperbole at conventions.

And hey. The Arrow wasn't chosen for the series costar because his title begins with "Green." Come *on*, Ted. The new structure demanded a character, of equal weight with GL, whose ideas were different. GA had already been established elsewhere as a kind of house radical (not to be confused with house hack) and nobody was using him in other books, and anyway, Neal had just given him a new costume, and he had a girlfriend who fit naturally, so we used him. Simple.

Now, the hard part:

For reasons of immense complexity, it is necessary to aim comics at the largest possible audience: translation, the lowest common denominator. Several attempts to raise the calibre of storytelling in the medium have failed in the marketplace, miserably. One need only consider Eisner's *Spirit*, the E.C. science fiction, our own *Batlash* to be convinced. It's uniquely frustrating: we all labor under the fear of getting too good.

Also: we have only about 23 pages' space. Call it 115 panels.

Also: we're an action medium. Nearly everything must be expressed in physical action/conflict. Maybe comics are evolving toward greater subtlety and nuance—the underground is helping—but they aren't there, by a good distance.

Take all these considerations, and imagine our difficulties in being "relevant." In "Journey to Desolation," for example, we bloody well *knew* we were being oversimplistic. We wanted to use comics to scream about the conditions that were pissing us off, and we had to adhere to the limits I mentioned above. So we were forced to oversimplify. Maybe we weren't successful—could be we shouldn't have tried to mix the intrinsic fantasy of GL with genuine, real-life concerns. But I don't regret the attempt, not for a second. As you admitted, some of the stories did work. And even if none had, I'm happy we used a medium characterized by the dumbest variety of chauvinism for three decades to make our protest. I think perhaps—I hope—some Bible Belt kid will read GL, and be pushed to at least question his inherited values. Judging from our hate mail, a lot of reactionary parents *fear* exactly that.

You wrote, "Contrasted with what Marvel was doing five years earlier, (the GL stories) rank a poor second—because Marvel slipped its 'relevance' into the cracks of admittedly and unabashedly flamboyant stories." Yeah, precisely. With Stan Lee's work, the "relevance" is trimming. We were trying to make it substance; we were raking muck, however superficially. I doubt anyone will ever really know the extent of our success or failure. The people we sought to reach aren't the intellectual type; they ain't writing no letters, bub.

Commercially, of course, we failed; the comic is no longer being published. After a couple stiff drinks, I might begin to mutter about the "too good" syndrome again. After a couple of whatever your's is, you'd doubtless disagree. So it goes.

Despite the foregoing rant, I'm grateful for the review (he said masochistically.) For all their problems, commercial comics *are*, potentially, an art form. Intelligent criticism, painful though it be, must help the medium gain the acceptance it already has in

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Europe.

There will be a second book in the series. You'll receive a review copy special delivery.

By the way, the rest of the June FANTASTIC was damn good.

DENNIS O'NEIL
New York, N.Y.

Most of the points you raise are matters of opinion or interpretation—and are best discussed, as you mention, in more social circumstances. For the record I should note that despite the fact that we find ourselves on opposed sides in this matter, I consider Denny a good friend and one whose opinions I value. His position is one of an "insider" in the comics industry; mine is that of an interested but non-involved "outsider" who desires to bring more objective critical standards to that field.
—TW

Dear Ted,

A couple of points that tie together your book review of *Green Lantern & Green Arrow* #1 and your editorial comments on fan awards' separation from world conventions—

(1) Not only did the Shazam Awards from the comic art pros heap laurels on 1970's GL/GA "relevant" work, but the 1970 Comic Art Fan Awards did likewise. Adams was Favorite Pro Artist, O'Neil tied for Favorite Pro Writer, GL/GA was Favorite Pro Comic-Book Story for the year. Two GL/GA stories (the two parts of the drug story you admire), Adams, O'Neil, editor Schwartz, the comic itself, and Green Arrow as a character are all on the final ballot for the Comic Art Fan Awards for 1971.

(2) Fan awards for the comic book work have been in yearly existence since the current super-hero interest began. The first year's work considered for awards was that of 1961, and the poll has been taken every year since then. It has never been connected with any convention officially—though announcements have been made of final results at some cons—and voting has *never* been accompanied by payment of a poll tax, either for nominating or final balloting. Roy Thomas (currently an editor for Marvel Comics) began the tradition when he was a fan, and the administration has been passed from hand to hand since then. Different controllers have come up with varied ballots, and the number of voters on the final ballot has ranged from 88 to 616. But it has all chugged along, and fan awards in the world of comics seem in fine health without the monolith of a worldcon . . .

MAGGIE THOMPSON
8786 Hendricks Road
Mentor, Ohio 44060

Dear Mr. White,

It's been a long time since I picked up a copy of FANTASTIC. And it probably would have been longer if I hadn't seen the name of Denny O'Neil in minute red print on your June cover. And while being an SF freak, I'm a comic book fanatic, first and foremost I'm also Denny O'Neil's archest critic.

In the field of the graphic story, Denny O'Neil is claimed to be it's best writer. That shows you how much scrutiny is used when judging talent nowadays. O'Neil tries too hard to be innovative, something which he can never succeed in doing. He has no flair

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for sensationalism, and his GL/GA stories lacked sorely for this (also because of the liberal stand he took. It turned conservatives, like me, off completely.) But if he does write a good story (a miracle in itself) I'm the first to congratulate him. And since this is a letter intended for publication in a SF magazine, not a comic book, let's move on to the finer (?) things.

"Mister Cherubim" wasn't all that bad. It showed potential. O'Neil's plot and word-use was excellent, yet there was something missing, a feeling of fullness, completion. He did capture the atmosphere of the period of which he was writing but he fell short regarding his people. Their characterizations were stiff and shallow. But always one to give credit where credit is due, "Mister Cherubim" was a marked improvement over the "Elseones" which appeared in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* a few months ago.

I was also somewhat surprised to see the work of some artists I've experienced in comix, fanzines, etc., Dave Cockrum, Mike Kaluta, Billy Graham, and Steve Harper. The piece by Kaluta was the best thing he's ever done, that I've seen.

And Alexei Panskin is writing better than ever.

JOE FARARA
3 Walnut Knoll
Canton, Mass. 02021

Dear Editor,

This letter, concerning part of your editorial in the April FANTASTIC, may be a little bit late. But the retailers in my area don't receive the science fiction magazines on time, and then I've been so busy with other things lately that I haven't had time to read the April issue until today.

What moved me to write was not the main subject of your editorial, but more like one of those "chance, casual utterances" you talked about in the first paragraph, although more *than* a chance remark.

You refer to comic book science fiction. You state that "without exception the science in comic book sf has been laughable" and that "without exception, what delineates 'comic book sf' is the superficiality of the rationale." These are both sweeping generalizations and, as such, do not give a true picture of science fiction in the comic books. What's more is that these same phrases could also be used in reference to sf in any other medium, television, movies, or even books and magazines, if the medium were judged the same way you apparantly judged the comics. *Most* (not all) of the sf in the comics *is* psuedo-scientific and ridiculous, but *most* of the sf in all other media is *also* psuedo-scientific and ridiculous. There are many fine original sf stories published in book form each year, but there are many, many more sf stories published in book form each year which are just trash, hack jobs or whatever. And this is true in all the other media as well. It's the reality of Sturgeon's Law, which states that "90% of everything (in every medium) is crud." I *agree* with your criticism of comic book sf, *if* it is applied in general and to most of the sf in the comics, not all of it.

There has been some *really good* sf in the comics through the years. And when I say "good," I mean in terms of plotting, characterization, and other elements of fiction, in addition to scientific soundness. You mentioned what you call "the few genuine attempts to

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put sf in comics," Hugo Gernsback's *Superworld Comics*, and EC's *Weird Science* and *Weird Fantasy* (the latter of which I consider "borderline sf," which is what I think *Weird Science* also was to an extent). But there has been more good sf in the comics than just that. There was, of course, the EC sf (and I'm talking here about the true sf in the EC comics, like the Ray Bradbury adaptations, *not* the blood-and-gore horror stories of the EC line), and there was also the Marvel sf and the DC sf of the fifties and early sixties, most of which was still trash but a lot of which, especially in the case of Marvel, was darn good. One of the Marvel stories, for example, a fantasy written by Stan Lee in which God comes down to Earth, runs for mayor of New York City, and loses, was selected by a major motion picture company to make into a movie, the screenplay to be written by Lee himself. And there was also the *Adam Strange* strip, the basic idea of which was gotten from the John Carter of Mars series, as well as others like *Green Lantern*, *Hawkman*, and, most recently, the Fourth World tetrology of Jack Kirby's.

Sure, when you look at comic book sf on the whole, it appears pretty preposterous. Most of the people writing sf stories in the comics—most of the people writing stories, period, in the comics—are hacks who can't write good fiction at all, especially good science fiction. And most comic book sf editors have such meagre backgrounds in science, as well as other limitations, that they can't see the difference between an Asimov story and by somebody like Bob Haney. But there are and have been good sf writers working for the comics and good sf-oriented editors.

One of the best comic book editors (and in my opinion, *the* best) of the last three and a half decades has been Julius Schwartz. Prior to his beginning employment at DC Comics, he had been co-operator, along with Mort Weisinger, of the Solar Sales Service, which was the literary agency for, among other sf writers, the late Stanley G. Weinbaum, and he had been co-publisher of the *Science Fiction Digest* (later *Fantasy Magazine*), which ran the famous *Cosmos* epic, to which John W. Campbell, Edmond Hamilton, Otto Binder, and other greats contributed. So Julius Schwartz was not just another comic book editor. He knew sf. He could produce comics with good sf stories in them. And he did. Most of the sf of the Golden Age of Comics (and I refuse to put quotes around that) *was* psuedo-scientific (although the sf stories, and the "super-hero" stories generally, had a mysterious quality of another kind, which I won't go into here), but there *was* some *good* sf in comics in the 1930's and '40's, and most of it came from the comics edited by Julius Schwartz. And there have been other comic book editors with science and science fiction literacy, too Ted Udall, Robert Kanigher, Sheldon Mayer, Whitney Ellsworth, Roy Thomas, and Gerry Conway.

And the good sf writers in the comics have included, at one time or another, Edmond Hamilton, Dave Vern, Horace Gold, Manly Wade Wellman, Alfred Bester, Otto Binder, Gardner Fox, Henry Kuttner, John Broome, Jim Shooter, Robert Kanigher, and Harlan Ellison. The one comic you single out by name for its psuedo-science, *Superman* ("The entire rationale of

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Star Trek was as thin as a *Superman* comic book—and about equally plausible."), has had the most sf and pulp authors writing it and the most stories written by sf pros.

So I think that sf in the comics has *not* been entirely bad, but that some—indeed, a lot—of it has been darn good. It's just a shame that most people, especially most sf pros, aren't aware of this and in many cases refuse to see this. And what bugged me particularly about your criticism of sf in the comics is that you, more than a lot of other sf pros, should know better. After all, you once worked in the comics yourself. You know that there *have been* some good sf stories and strips in the comics over the years. Anyway, I hope I've accomplished *something* with this letter. And if you still dont' believe that there's ever been any good sf in the comics, all you have to do is get a hold of some of the Binder or Hamilton *Superman* stories, some of the Marvel sf mags of the fifties and early sixties, some of the Adam Strange *Mystery in Space* mags, or some of the others, or you can get some examples now at the newstands. Jack Kirby's books are on sale every month, and I think Harlan Ellison has an *Avengers* story coming up in May or sometime soon. Good science fiction in the comics is there. You just have to look for it.

LESTER G. BOUTILLIER
2726 Castiglione Street
New Orleans, Louisiana

I think Dennis O'Neil's letter answers by implication the point you're making—comic book sf is limited, both by the ignorance of some of its writers and by the awareness of others of "the 'too good' syndrome". To be sure, any number of well-known writers have scripted Superman—but very few of the stories justified their efforts; the weight of the accumilated periphenalia (supporting characters, Kryptonian history, et al) was too great. I have read all of the examples you cited, and will stand by my editorial comments. —TW

Dear Mr. White,

This is only a brief note to ask if you would be willing to tell your readers about the plans for the annual Modern Language Association seminar (December, 1972) in New York. We will be treating the writings and illustrations of Mervyn Peake, an author who has finally been rediscovered in England (and hopefully in this country as well). We should encourage comments from your readers on Peake's *Titus Groan* trilogy; I'm sure the "academicians", like myself, would welcome the opinion of fandom on Peake. By the way, the role of the SFRA will be discussed at the LA Con in September. I should enjoy hearing from fans on the hazards and hilarities of teaching SF. Actually, we Profs *do* love you . . .

GLEN SADLER
401 Flint Avenue
Long Beach, CA, 90814

Dear Ted,

Re yr editorial FANT June 72:

It would seem to me that the way out of the Hugo expense problem is as follows:

The price for the vote should be nominal, about one dollar. It should not be neccesary to join the convention to vote for the awards. All proceeds from the awards should go to the convention however.

In order to gain a wider base, the

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voting should be open to everyone. Ballots should be printed in the prozines, so that there would be thousands rather than hundreds voting. Prozines could donate the space for the ballots. (If one did, all would be forced to, lest the one that did have a wildly unfair advantage. And as you know, being able to splash "HUGO AWARD WINNER" all over the covers does sell magazines.) The result would be that with all those extra people voting, the convention committee would take in far more money than it would if inflated prices were charged under the present system. So the vote would be inexpensive, the conventions would prosper, the awards would take on more meaning as a true reflection of reader preferences, and in general there would be something in such a scheme for everybody.

Objections anyone?

DARRELL SCHWEITZER
113 Deepdale Rd.
Strafford, Pa. 19087

Dear Ted,

Thanks for running my letter in your editorial in the June FANTASTIC. I enjoyed your comments.

When I mentioned "hotel costs," I was of course aware that the function rooms are not charged for. What I had in mind were the kinds of things you listed under "negotiable points": room rates, banquet costs, special services, etc. A lot of groups have probably started out figuring that they could get lower rates than those of previous committees, only to be disappointed.

As for committee "expenses," I wasn't thinking of that kind of lagniappe when I mentioned "pecuniary rewards;" as you pointed out, such "fringe benefits" serve at most to mitigate the financial sacrifice inevitably associated with putting on a Worldcon. A lot more money would have to be involved before that practice became a significant factor in determining who did and did not bid.

I think your emphasis on membership prices is disproportionate. If you compare the prices of movies or other outside-the-home entertainment, or the current prevailing level of kids' allowances, it is difficult to believe that any fee of $10 or less for five days and four nights of convention activities works a substantial hardship. After all, where do you think those "profits of over a thousand dollars" made by the hucksters come from? The raggediest kids are in there buying (and bidding at the auctions) just as vigorously (if not more so) as anybody else (and I agree that the market would definitely bear higher table charges).

The major expenses for most con goers lie in three other areas: lodging, food and transportation; and I think that a lot can be done in those areas. The best idea in lodging that I've seen in a long time was the plan used at the Westercon in Santa Barbara. There the committee rented an entire building and then parceled out the sleeping rooms. The result was a very good price for very good accomodations. The Francisco Torres in Santa Barbara is especially oriented to that sort of arrangement, but perhaps with some hard bargaining a similar arrangement can be made with a number of smaller hotels around the convention site.

A while ago, I went to an anarchists' convention. In general, they were far behind fans in the art of organizing conventions. In one respect, though, they had one up on us: instead of

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relying on expensive restaurants for food, a number of local anarchists each brought out sandwiches, hot plates, etc., and set up free-lance food stalls (I should point out that most of the people there were anarcho-capitalists rather than communal or "utopian" anarchists). In the major hotels, union problems would probably prevent it, but perhaps in one of the smaller "satellite" hotels the committee could pay some local fans a couple of bucks an hour to run a sandwich-and-hot-dog type of operation on close to a break-even basis.

In the matter of transportation, I think that charters have a good deal of promise. In the past, there have been a few efforts in this direction, but they have usually lacked any overall co-ordination. If the committee, through the progress reports or separate mailings, acted as a clearinghouse and publicity center for such efforts, I think that they could play a much larger role in easing the cost of transportation. Another possibility is for the committe to act as a clearinghouse for ride-sharing. Again, such efforts have been severely handicapped in the past by lack of co-ordination.

Any of the above could have a much greater impact on convention costs for most people than any realistic cut in membership fees. The main reason that fees have attracted so much attention, I think, is due to an attitude towards money like that of the Victorians toward sex: they were willing to admit that it existed and was necessary, but anyone who had anything to do with it was presumed guilty until proven innocent, and the less there was of it the better. Perhaps a closer analogy would be Avery Brundage of the International Olympic Committee and his concept of amateurism. Let's face it: money is here to stay; it is a pivotal factor in organizing any convention (and has been for some time and shows no tendency to stop being so in the future), and any "code of convention practices" will have to face this reality on a frank basis if it is to be an effective explicit or implicit set of ethics for organizers. Your bringing the matter of committee "expenses" out in the open is an important step away from the era in which financial matters are discussed in snickering whispers in the locker room. A good attitude to take, in my judgment, would be an emphasis on comparing the fees a committee charged, along with the room rates and other expenses of con-going, with the overall quality of the convention, leaving the question of "expenses" and other internal financial matters to be settled between the committee and Internal Revenue. After all, when you go into a supermarket, what you care about is whether you get better food at lower prices at Safeway or the A&P, not what kind of the car the manager drives or how much he makes. Whether or not the analogy is completely valid, the fact of the matter is that fandom is just too large and spread out for any sort of effective "auditing" of committee financial affairs. Such attempts would only lead to charges and counter-charges, and serve as a pretext for lasting bitterness and feuds.

ERWIN S. STRAUSS
c/o GE Co.
APO Seattle 98736

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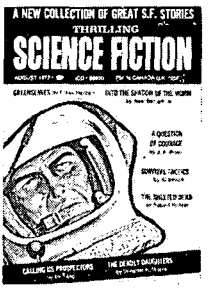

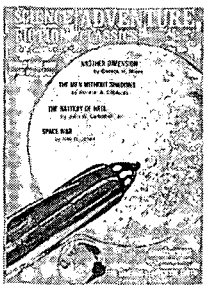

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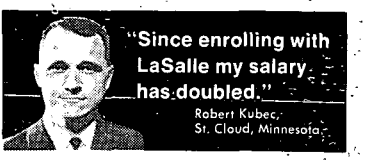

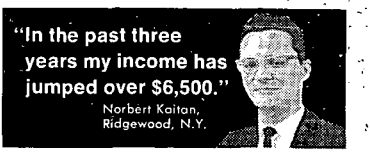

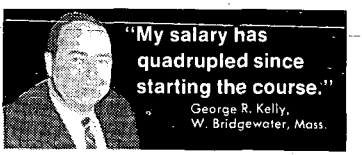

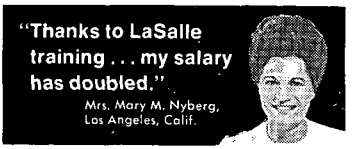

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